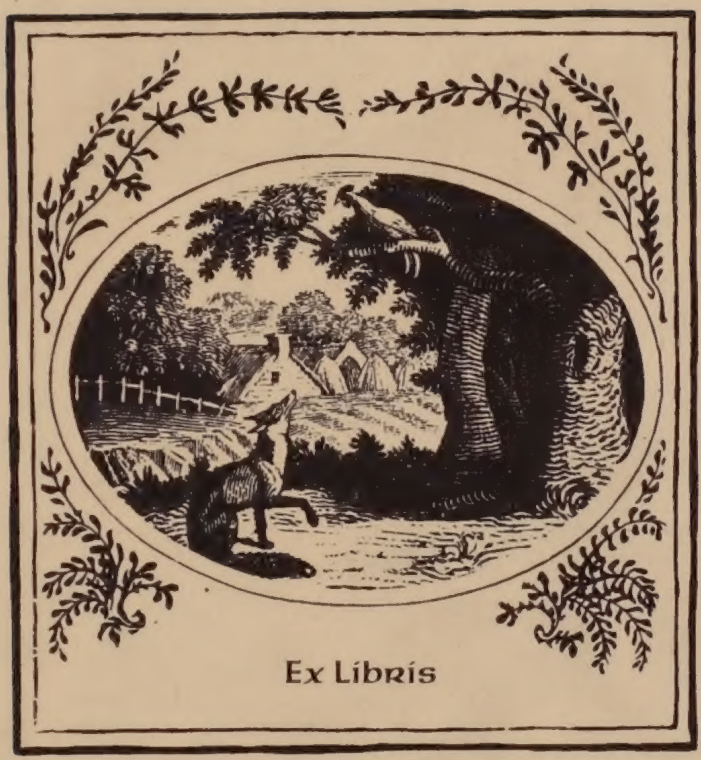


John Gerard Heckscher.



John and Martha Daniels

A BOX FOR THE SEASON.

A Sporting Sketch.

BY CHARLES CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF 'CHARLIE THORNHILL.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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A BOX FOR THE SEASON.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STABLE.

And so Tom and Munster took possession of what was once a respectable farm-house, and was known as "The Château." The garden was trimmed and neat, laid-out in gravel walks and box-edgings; a few new trees on the walls; a little glass, giving indications of a greenhouse or conservatory, with other advantages for the fabrication of a builder's and mason's bill. There were some arbours here and there, round which the straggling roses had been induced to climb; there was some water in a round stone basin on the little lawn, with a triton or two, who blew the water out of their horns, and wetted the admiring stranger

whenever he forgot to steer to windward. Inside of the house was everything calculated to make bachelorhood pleasant, and to preclude the absolute necessity for a tea-urn or its presiding divinity. There was no smoking-room, because every room was a smoking-room excepting one; that was a lady's room to all intents and purposes, and belonging exclusively to the reigning Mrs. Crackenthorpe, who, notwithstanding Mr. Parkinson's surmises, was no other than Tom's own mother. In these days of indiscriminate impropriety, perhaps the reverend gentleman might have been forgiven for his hasty suspicions; but it is hard that a young man cannot fit up a room in his cottage for his own mamma without arousing the jealous innuendoes of his neighbours. Certainly Tom and his mother had to thank the prurient sensibilities of the age we live in for the insinuation. And then poor Mrs. Crackenthorpe had been in the village several Sundays, and had not been to church. Why, the little woman might have been a Quakeress, or a Socinian, or an

Anabaptist. It seems, too, that she was very indifferent to the opinions of the Vicar and his friends; for she only laughed when she heard it, which she did of course through her maid, and said—"The old fellow is so wicked himself, that he thinks everybody else must be like him." She did wisely, however, to keep it from Tom Crackenthorpe, who honoured his mother above all women, and would certainly have broken the Vicar's head for his stupidity. You see it was only stupidity after all; and the talking (pious man!) about what he did not understand. Some men and women would regard that ignorance of the world as a misfortune; I, on the other hand, am inclined to give it the full reward of merit, as being very rare in these days. So apt, indeed, in such matters is the present generation, that the names of the most celebrated courtezans are frequently on the lips of matronly women and innocent girls; and their broughams, horses, opera-boxes, and paramours form the staple of much fashionable conversation. Surely it cannot

be in the hope that frequent repetition will deaden the sense of our women to little irregularities of husbands and brothers, or that a familiarity with such vices will produce a philosophical indifference to their existence.

Tom's house altogether was a very creditable performance. His friend Sparkes had suggested this, and ordered that, with Tom's cheque-book in view, in such a manner, and so efficiently, that, excepting that the roof was a little uncertain in case of rain or rather heavy snow, that the pump wanted lowering, the drainage re-arranging, several stench-traps putting down, and that there was little or no soft water, and no ready means of catching it, the Box Hall was quite perfection. One or two of the doors gave Tom and his lodger such heavy reminiscences of their original intention, by beating in first the crowns of their hats, and then of their heads, that some rather trite and not complimentary expressions were elicited from them towards the original architect. There were some rats too; but

that might be expected from the nature of the place; and Crackenthorpe and Munster were both fond of rat-hunting. It is true that it remains a question whether one's own morning-room is the best place for practice. Tom said not, and got some ferrets, some ground glass, some virulent poison, which he was in deadly fear of his favourite Snap swallowing, and a huge cat, a most effective remedy for the one evil; but which broke all the things that were broken, drank more than sixteen gallons of pale ale in one week, took all the eggs, destroyed several bottles of the best claret (at least they showed the broken bottles, and that number was missing from the bin), and was altogether as mischievous, gluttonous, and, I may say, as drunken a cat, as the best butler or housekeeper could desire. Well, all this was nothing. What a thing it was to be a housekeeper, a voter, a vestryman, an object of ever-increasing interest to the softer sex! and then the stables really were excellent. Not that these two faithful friends, one of whom

found the money, and the other borrowed it, contemplated sleeping there themselves. But the stables were, after all, the chief consideration. What have they come to Lushenham for but to hunt? They must have horses, and horses must have houses; and, as the horses did the hunting, their houses ought to be the best. There was stabling for sixteen. At present Tom had four, and Munster had two—that is to say, ostensibly: they belonged to Mr. Curricle, of wide-spread repute. They had their faults; but part of the science of horsemanship is to find them out, so, of course, no really creditable dealer is so foolish as to mention them beforehand. They were calculated to carry Robert Munster very well, whose hunting was a bit of a farce, and usually performed at other people's expense: besides, he was not likely to purchase, as we know already, and altogether Mr. Curricle knew his customer.

I know the world is very suspicious on the subject of horse-dealers in general. They don't get credit for much honesty;

and any liberality (which is on the surface undeniable) of which they may happen to be the perpetrators is always placed to interested motives. You see, when men are purchasing horses, they usually assume a certain amount of self-importance and knowledge of the subject; and if they happen to take in the dealer, and give only 50*l.* for what is honestly worth 100*l.*, I never heard of one of my acquaintance suggesting an increase of demand. I have known an honest and liberal man to say to his son's tutor—"I expect my son to derive even more advantages from your tuition than he has from those seminaries of useful and ornamental literature, Eton and Harrow; and I must therefore at least make your remuneration equal to theirs;" but I never heard of any compact of this nature between the purchaser and professional seller of horses. "You shall give me 20*l.* more if he goes on well, or if you like him," is a not uncommon form of expression, which sometimes ends in merit being justly recognised; but it happens quite as often that the horse dis-

appears, and nothing further is heard of the conditional surplus fund.

Now, I quite believe in honest horse-dealing. I do not mean that a dealer is compelled to say—"This horse is an excellent animal—sufficiently good-looking, and goes well through dirt; he is also an admirable water-jumper; but, to tell you the truth, he had the influenza in the spring of the year: and, though he shows no signs of the infirmity yet, I advise you not to buy him, as he is pretty certain to become a roarer sooner or later;" or, "This horse I regard as a regular flat-catcher. He has a neat head and neck, good legs and feet, a fine mover, and is, as you see, calculated to make a first-class hack; but he is really not worth 20*l.*; for he is, without exception, the worst doer and the softest brute I ever threw my leg over." But then I never heard the most conscientious of shopkeepers say—"There are a quantity of flaws in this china, which none but a dealer's eye can detect. It's true you don't see them, but there they are;

and when you want to part with it, the trade won't have it at any price." Or, "Yes, sir, it is a charming clock to look at, but it won't go any more than North American paper." Notwithstanding this, I think there are honest horsedealers.

"Where are the hounds to-morrow, Drinkwater?" said Munster, about the second or third morning after their arrival, and when it was time to begin the important business of the chase.

"Saltmarsh Bottom, sir; six mile from here, or thereabouts."

"What sort of a country is it?"

"Capital; pretty near all grass, and beautiful fencing country. What will you ride, sir? You've got a couple of useful-looking nags; but, Lor' bless me! you never knows till you tries 'em."

"The bay mare with the white foot. She's not so much flesh on her as she might have at the beginning of a season." And Mr. Munster put his hand on the mare's back ribs, at which she gave a gentle squeal and a kick.

"Ay; but she's full of life, if she's short of flesh," said Billy approvingly. And what's Mr. Crackenthorpe going to ride?"

"Oh! the new horse he bought at the Repository before we went to Wiesbaden, I believe."

"Oh, no! indeed he's not though." And Billy shook his head, and dropped his hands deep into his pockets. "Indeed, he's not, I can tell yer."

"And why not, Billy?"

"'Cos I don't intend to let him. If he don't know when he's well off, he must be taught, as Muster Horsman, M.P., told 'em at Stroud. I'm going to ride him fust myself, and if he ain't so very bad, why *you* may have a ride, if you like; but not a gent with my master's expectations."

If it be any satisfaction to be put at one's right value, Billy Drinkwater had a way of satisfying most people. Munster was not the least astonished, still less offended, at Drinkwater's plain speaking; and, though he had certainly no intention of riding the kicking horse himself, he was almost proud

that he came second only to his master in Billy's estimation. The fact is, Billy regarded him only as some chattel or belonging of Tom Crackenthorpe, and as such gave him precedence over the chattels of other people. Presently Tom himself appeared in the stable-yard.

"Good stabling, at all events," said he, with a self-complacent nod to his stud-groom. "That's not a very bad box, Drinkwater?"

"It's not a very good one; perhaps it would have been, if there was a little light, and more air with less draught; and, as to the drainage—"

Tom saw it was not a propitious hour, so he asked which horse he could ride to-morrow.

"Well, I'm going to ride the new horse, as you bought before you went away: we've sold Peter; and I'm blest if I think you've a horse fit to carry you."

"What! not Vulcan? Why, he's as hard as iron, and he's good enough for anything. I'll ride Vulcan."

"Dose of physic; leastways prepared."

"Then I have the brown horse. What's his name? Nosegay."

"He'll put you down in that country. You can have the chesnut, Flowerpot, if you like." This was said with some condescension, as if he were granting a great favour. "And mind you don't ride him too hard, sir; he's short o' work since I been away, and he's really a good horse, he is. And as to Mr. Munster, he must get another: he shan't ride him any more."

Here Mr. Drinkwater cut short all further conversation, by saying that Mr. Crackenthorpe must be up in time to ride Flowerpot on, as he'd no hack to put him on; and by walking out of the stable, and putting the key in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MEETING.

It was a very nice morning—for hunting. It was slightly foggy, with a turn of east in a southerly wind. There was not much stirring, and it looked like scent. Of course, novelists can make what sort of mornings they please; and it is a matter of wonder to me that, in describing a hunting-day, they invariably forget that little *soupçon* of east in the atmosphere, which would be sure to give them what they are so seldom able to describe—a run. In the fashionable romances of the day, a hunting-field is a necessary picture, and an accident in the field a certain accompaniment to a hero; but we always get a run on an impossible occasion, and a fall at an impracticable fence. Then he is taken to the right

house, and the right woman appears in the right place: he lingers between life and death, and eventually recovers to be the husband of one wife and the progenitor of many little sportsmen. But if a severe horrid critic, like ——, who really knows what sport is, got hold of the book, and turned up his material, what a pretty figure our fashionable author would cut, in the midst of his fox-hunting zeal! His horses would be reduced to the pace of a quadruped, instead of a steam-engine; his post and rails under five feet six high; and the whole thing, put into form, would be scarcely recognisable by the author. "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*"

It was a fine hunting morning; and Bobby Munster had twice knocked up Cracks from his dressing-room, who was always late, as men of great expectations should be. They breakfasted heartily—a little rapidly; and, notwithstanding the smell of paint, managed some broiled fish, sausages eggs, and a slice of brawn. Munster made tea, and asked for the beer at the

end of it. They pledged each other in it before starting, and seemed to relish it exceedingly. There might have been a reason for this thirst—or was it only to try the new tap? I like myself to know what sort of beer is kept in a house; but I usually wait until later in the day.

There is nothing further to remark in the appearance of these ingenuous youths, as they mounted their horses and sallied forth, than that Mr. Crackenthorpe was got up with unusual care. He was not a person to take extraordinary trouble about his toilet generally; but his blue neckcloth, well-polished boots, best fitting leathers, and Sunday hat, proclaimed a festival. It may be also remarked that he looked carefully up and down the village, without, however, seeing a living soul, excepting the village schoolmistress, who not only made a reverence herself to two scarlets, but was followed by the half-dozen urchins whom she was driving to school. Tom was beginning to be a squire; and his rank was acknowledged by a flock of geese.

A ride to cover is much the same everywhere; so that the six miles between Lushenham and Saltmarsh Bottom was like every other six miles in the world, when the end is the same, and the pursuers of an average amount of intelligence. They first displayed their capacity on the subject of scent, of which they clearly knew nothing. Here, however, they were on a par with the best part of mankind. Then they turned to their horses; and here they were more at home—that is to say, Crackenthorpe was. Munster's knowledge of horseflesh was, at best, questionable; and, beyond not being pitched off, or hung up in a tree, he had very little appreciation of the capabilities of the animal that carried him.

"What sort of an animal is that, Bob? You got him from Curricle's, didn't you? He looks a bit leggy."

"If he's half as leggy as his master, he must be an impostor," said Munster. "He's very easy to ride, and let's you blow your nose or light your cigar without trying to slip from under you. Whether he means

tumbling or jumping over his fences is another matter: I shall find out to-day perhaps." Here Bob lit his cigar as illustrative of this remark.

Presently they passed a couple of grooms, going on to the meet. "Capital time," said Cracks to himself. "What a fool I was to hurry!"

They were just then overtaken by Billy Drinkwater, on the new horse. He was suspiciously temperate, and most provokingly amicable as yet—not Billy, but the horse.

"I think, amost, we've been taken in with this here 'oss," observed Mr. Drinkwater. He usually spoke as if he were a partner in the concern generally, in the stable department especially.

"What makes you think that?" said his nominal master.

"He's a deal too good-tempered for that 'ere lawyer."

A whole flood of wholesome recollections crowded at once upon the brain of Squire Crackenthorpe. Money-lenders, a little

shooting, Christmas, parchments, titles, and deeds, with all the paraphernalia belonging to six and eightpence, thirteen and fourpence, and one guinea; the red tape and unread documents, which he suddenly felt to be the delusive marks of the friendship of old Sparkes, whose name and person conjured up, at the moment, the personification of Old Nick. Grave doubts beset his mind as to whether he ought not to have proposed for one of the girls; and he certainly thought that Munster might have helped him out of the difficulty. "Selfish beggar!" thought Tom. "And Amelia wasn't so bad-looking, after all. Besides, he need only have hung on till the bill was sent in. What fools we were!" Here his thoughts turned upon women; and if scent, horses, and lawyers were impenetrable mysteries, what was to be made of a woman—of one woman, in particular? He wondered he had not seen her. Would she be out? After all, he had not forgotten her. Perhaps she was not so good-looking as he imagined. "I wonder if she ever goes

to church?" To be sure, he might have cleared up all his doubts at once by asking his servant; but he really could not. "No, no! hang it! that will never do. Fancy asking Billy Drinkwater about a lady! or Munster, who probably does not know, and laughs at everything. Most unprincipled fellow, about women, I ever knew: thinks them all as bad as himself."

"Hallo, Cracks!" said young Lawless, riding up at this moment, and greeting his friend with a sudden and hearty slap on the back; "how long have you been down?"

"Only four or five days. I've a place at Lushenham, and haven't horses or anything else. Munster and I have taken it together."

This was certainly true, if being in the same fly, and drinking the same claret, and at the same table, constituted partnership.

"All right, old fellow! Lots of foxes; and Bumby is the right man to give 'em a shaking. He's had some capital sport in

the cubbing season, and rattled the covers well. Besides, his country's so wild, that we're sure of sport, if it's to be had anywhere."

"Who are down here?"

"Oh, the usual lot. Boys to open the gates and macadamize the lanes. Half-a-dozen or so that go like blue blazes; and an occasional draft from Pumpington or the Pytchley, who exhibit their animosity in the field to such an extent as to endanger the neck of the huntsman and the limbs of the hounds, in endeavouring to avoid them."

"Any women out?" inquired Tom, with a faint blush.

"No, thank God! I hate women—that is, out hunting. By the bye, there is a Mrs. something or other, like Brandy."

"Likes brandy!" said Tom, *sotto voce*. "Is she pretty?"

"'Pon my soul, I don't know! I never looked at her. But that's not her name: that's her mother. She lives at Lushenham, or somewhere in that direction.

Blunder told me, so perhaps it's all a lie."

There was no doubt this was the woman Tom was in search of. He accepted the opening thus given, and called up Billy Drinkwater.

"Do you know a Mrs. Brandy, or something of that sort, living in Lushenham?"

"Brandy? Brandy? Mrs. Brandy, sir?" said Drinkwater, touching his hat. Billy was quite a pattern when he was in what he called *perminxtuous* company. "She's a hold lady as lives in the white cottage near the Vicarage."

"Does she hunt, then?" asked Tom, with well-feigned ignorance.

"Hunt? Oh, no, sir—leastways, not the fox." Here Billy leered artfully. "It's the young lady—that's to say, she's a widow."

"What's her name?"

"Greystoke; Mrs. Greystoke." Here Billy dropped behind.

"Can she ride, Lawless?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say she can, devilish

well; and, consequently, she's always in the way. She won't tumble off, and she won't be hung up."

"I see how it is: you don't know whether she's pretty or no: you're always behind her. Is to-day one of her days?"

"Yes! I should think so. The cattle come about every other day. The boy's light enough, to be sure; and she usually goes home after the first fox. Turn to the right. There they are, by gad! what beauties!"

Tom and Munster scanned the horizon eagerly for the women, and were at a loss when they perceived nothing but hounds.

"Yoick over, yoick over, Scrummager! Get to him, Bloodynose!" and both Scrummager and Bloodynose, being good hounds, did yoick in and get to him. Then were heard the "clash, clash!" of the whips, and the "toot, toot!" of the huntsman. Presently one hound opened, then another; then a fine old melodious note, which set all doubt at defiance; and in a minute or two there was a regular "huntsman's

chorus" from the whole pack. At this moment, while Tom was contemplating a well-rounded symmetrical habit about a hundred yards a-head of him, attended by a light boy, admirably got up, and proceeding to jog on, in hopes of a full view of his divinity (for it was quite clear that it was she), he was diverted from his purpose by a shrill tallyho, and within another minute a cheerful hallo, which proclaimed the game on foot. "Go-o-o-o-ne away!" sung out Jack, at the further corner of the cover; and, not to be behindhand, away went hat and habit, and about fifty black coats, and half as many scarlets, in pursuit. Tom Crackenthorpe was an enthusiastic admirer of the chase, and though at that moment longing for a view of the lady in front, he sent the spurs into the chestnut, and, catching hold of Flowerpot by the head, drove him along at a pace that very soon began to overhaul the crowd. They were all brought up in the next field by a "Pray hold hard," the hounds having been forced too far up the hedge-row by

some old Pumpington swells of Tom's acquaintance. In the front of the crowd sat the widow. She looked as handsome as ever, and had lost none of her beauties since Tom's absence on the Continent. He had only seen her once before, but she looked like an old acquaintance. She was sitting well down in her saddle, and evidently preparing for a fresh burst, when, turning her handsome eyes in Tom's direction, she caught sight of him. Whether his gaze was a little too full of admiration or not, it is difficult to say; perhaps it was: at all events she turned rapidly away, and withdrew herself from the crowd. Just then the hounds, having been turned to the line, and the huntsman having got them through the horsemen as well as he could, took to hunting, and in another five minutes our hero found himself in a narrow grass lane, jogging peaceably along, with one eye on the hounds and the other on Mrs. Greystoke, who was doing the same a little in front of him. "Hang the woman! there she is again; and how quietly he

rides! Lawless always was a bit of a *farceur*; nothing could be more ladylike." Away they went again; a quick burst of a quarter of an hour, and nothing more was seen of her, till, after a long check, she trotted in among the macadamizers as coolly and as collectedly as if she had never been out of a walk. It was not at all what Tom expected. She had not jumped a fence. Now and then, too, she exchanged a word or a bow with some man whom she knew; but never was anything so indisputable as her modesty.

"What a deuced impudent fellow that Bosville is, to be sure!" said Tom to his friend Munster. "It's quite evident she don't care for his attention. Look at the fool, how he stands there opening the gate. I suppose her groom can manage to do that for her."

"Who do you mean?" said the gentleman addressed, being at that moment engaged in looking for a gate out of the next field, as the hounds had just evinced a desire to run.

"Why, Mrs. Greystoke, to be sure. Confound those hounds! they're going to run again!" And not yet having acquired sufficient courage to turn away from a run, he was obliged to set Flowerpot going.

The scent was improving every moment, the fences began to get bigger, and the chestnut more resolute; and it ended in a capital thing, with a kill at the termination of about five-and-forty minutes. Amongst the first of the macadamizers Mrs. Greystoke reappeared.

Fine hunting mornings not unfrequently turn to rain. As Tom was riding quietly home, having long dismissed all cares of the chase, and thinking of nothing, he felt a large spot on his nose—then another, and another. Munster had already disappeared with some old acquaintance, most men had jogged on, and there was not a soul in sight. Patter, patter came the rain. On the right was a gate, and a hovel of considerable size; and a streak of broken-line of cloud showed that the shower would not be interminable. He was not yet wet; the

wind was blowing straight in his teeth. He had one regalia left; it was not cold; and shelter in the hovel would take him home comfortably with a dry skin. Capital idea! He should still be at Lushenham early, and Flowerpot would be none the worse for resting out of the wind. Ideas so good are not to waste themselves on a south-easterly wind. He turned through the gate, and, with the easy seat and loose rein peculiar to the highest class of British sportsmen, jogged into the hovel. There sat, unruffled by a single feather, the widow Greystoke, and in close attendance that infernal boy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PLEASANT RIDE HOME.

The end of the last chapter saw Tom Crackenthorpe in a rather delicate position. To say he was taken aback is not quite strong enough, for the widow was the last person he expected to see, though the first in his thoughts; and the sight of her nearly knocked him of his horse. Since the day Tom had first seen her at Lushenham, she had never looked more beautiful; and if bright colour, pencilled eyebrows, cleanly cut features, and a fine set of teeth, were any recommendations, the claims of the widow Greystoke were not to be denied. The gentleman, at that moment, did not look his best; indeed, he was no beauty, though a straightforward, manly fellow enough, at the best of times: and there are

circumstances which take the shine out of your fast young men. Pumpington life had never exhibited a phase like the present. Tom had always been countenanced in his little flirtations by the men and women of his set. The latter were quite as eager for the fray as he; and, though truth compels me to add he was somewhat of a glutton, there were plenty there ready to give him his fill. He had never been accustomed to wade through difficulties to the wished-for haven, but had rather played the game of "any port in a storm," and run for the nearest. In fact, this was nearly the first time he had found himself in a twelve-foot by six straw-thatched outhouse, occupied by a goddess on horseback, and a Cupid in top-boots too big for him; and, as the cloud within looked pretty nearly as black as the one without, he was not far from turning round, and making the best of his way off again: nothing but a real waterspout, which began to descend at that moment, wetting the adhesive plaster of his affections, glued him to the spot.

A flattering writer would say that no sooner had he recovered his surprise than she smiled complacently. I am compelled to admit that his unmeaning simper was worthy of the greatest fool in the three kingdoms; and was met, naturally enough, by a timidity which we know to be the peculiar attribute of widows. He essayed to speak, after a silence of five minutes' duration; but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and when it relaxed he got no further than "Rather a wet morning." As it was quite impossible to contradict this meteorological fact, he had it all to himself —as much, indeed, as Mr. Spurgeon in his Tabernacle, or any other asserter of indisputable truths. The widow looked assent; and young Boots examined the clouds. Another silence, and Tom bethought himself of a question which must elicit a reply. "Did the lady object to the smell of a cigar?" "By no means," replied she—without, however, exhibiting much anxiety to prolong the conversation. Tom carefully unpacked, rolled, and lit a regalia of the most orthodox pattern.

"You were fortunate in reaching this shelter before the shower," said he once more, with the desperation of a man leading a forlorn-hope, and not certain of getting much, if successful.

"And you, too," said she, which might or might not be the case, as the adventure should turn out for Tom Crackenthorpe. He saw it in that light, and replied with a gallantry, the offspring of something beyond even Pumpington—"Most certainly, to have had the pleasure of, a-hem—aw—aw—making—a-hem the acquaintance." And in went the widow; as when some mischievous schoolboy, on some summer's day, touches with presumptuous hand the slowly-emerging snail, no less quickly did she return to that reserve from which she had shown an inclination to come out. Tom was unlucky; for if any of my readers have an idea of the struggle it cost him to get up this not very uncommon compliment, and his anticipations of victory, they have a conception considerably beyond the ordinary run of that faculty. For a really modest young

gentleman, who was given to horseflesh and bachelor parties, and who had been accustomed to the playful raillery of the Bulrushes, the Sparkeses, and Clara Jones, this was downright purgatory; and as the rain was no longer so heavy, and the approach of the thin streaks of light in the sky proclaimed a total cessation in another minute, Tom was buttoning his coat preparatory to a start, when the lady took the initiative, and saying, "I think it will do now," rode majestically out of the shed, followed by young Boots at a respectful distance.

"Not made much progress, then," said Tom to himself, as he chewed the end of the regalia with increased rapidity, and then rolled it round between his finger and thumb. "What an infernal sell, to be sure! I wonder whether she knows who I am, or where I live? Dash it! what a pretty woman she is! she's so quiet, too! She doesn't think small beer of herself either: however, I like that, rather. Well, I suppose I must go—there's not much use in stopping here any longer. Come up, lazy;" and, giving

Flowerpot, who had been indulging in a short nap, a gentle reminder, he also walked out of the hovel, directly in the wake of the mysterious widow. A sort of irresistible impulse urged him to canter on as soon as he was clear of the field in which the hovel was situated, and the nice soft squashy grass by the side of the road afforded him the opportunity. As women always ride fast along the road, and usually everywhere else, he did not quite calculate upon catching his late companion so soon as he did; for, on turning through a gate at the end of the lane which led through some fields, by a short cut, to Lushenham, there she was, having pulled up, in close confabulation with the boy. Presently that young man dismounted, and proceeded to examine the off fore-leg of his mistress's horse: not being satisfied with the survey, he proceeded to treat the near leg to the same professional examination. Then he put that down, and his mistress rode on a few paces. And then it was evident that, from some cause or other, the neat-looking bay horse was

dead lame. By this time Crackenthorpe had reached the boy, who was again behind.

"What's the matter, boy?" said he, pulling his horse into a walk.

"Missus has got a stone in her foot, or sprained her leg, or somethin'; but I've been a handlin' it, and I can't see nothing, sir."

Tom could not very well see any woman in such a strait without going to her assistance: of course it was with some reluctance that he even then addressed her. "If I can be of any service to you, I shall be very happy; your servant says you have a stone in your foot."

"My horse has had, I believe," said she, with a charming smile—"and I am much obliged; you see he can scarcely put his foot to the ground."

"Allow me to give you advice," said Tom, quite emboldened by the change of manner; "if I might suggest such a thing, I should leave the lame horse to the boy, and change saddles immediately. He can come slowly after us." And, in accordance

with this advice, the boy was ordered to change the saddles, which he did with Tom Crackenthorpe's assistance, whilst Mrs. Greystoke held Tom's horse. "He won't kick, will he?" And in about ten minutes she was ready to mount. "And now how am I to get up?"

"How do you get up at home?" said Tom.

"There's a horseblock at the front gate."

"There's none here, and I see nothing like it."

Tom was half afraid to propose inspecting the foot, it looked so like presumption.

"Dear, dear! what is to be done?" sighed the widow. "How provoking!"

"If you—you—you would but allow me to—to——"

"Oh! really—dear me! I'm sure I give you a great deal of trouble; but I'm afraid Robert is rather—rather—too short."

So, having made a virtue of necessity, she placed a very small neat boot in the palm of Mr. Crackenthorpe, and one hand

on the pommel of her saddle, and was in another moment on her sound horse.

Tom started by her side; and if anything is calculated to break the ice, it is the caloric that may be raised by the last-mentioned process.

"Now, pray, don't let me detain you, or take you out of your way."

"I believe our roads lie the same," rejoined Tom; and he thought he should like to have added—"through life."

"Impossible!" said the widow: "I live four miles from here, and in the very stupidest of places."

"That's exactly my own case," said Tom, with an enraptured smile.

"Surely not at Lushenham?" replied she, with a simplicity, which was, if not the result of long practice, the highest effect of natural genius.

"Precisely. I live in the new house, at the cross roads, formerly inhabited by Farmer Simcox. I am happy to think we are neighbours."

"I am afraid mamma and I are not very

gay. Our position prevents us from going out much, or receiving at home; and I am hunting by order of my medical man."

Here the widow put her hand to her side.

"And you are very fond of horse exercise?"

"I love it to distraction; but I fear we ladies are often in the way."

"In the way? bless me, no!" said Tom, who had hitherto hated the sight of a woman in the field at any time. "In the way! One of the most charming things in the world is to see a lady enjoying the fresh air, and enlivening the meet by her presence." Tom spoke in raptures.

"But not over fences; surely you confine us to the gates?"

"That's a university punishment, and one inflicted upon themselves by old gentlemen in the midland counties, in after life. But, really, I can't see why, if a lady likes to ride"—

Tom was lying to such an extent as has never been equalled.

"Well, seriously, I always abstain only

upon the principle that we are in the way —*de trop*, in fact—as soon as we leave the road."

"I'm sure I hope you'll discard that notion as soon as possible, and be found in the first flight."

Verily Tom was getting on. Just then they caught sight of Lushenham in the distance, on the banks of the muddiest ditch I ever saw dignified with the name of a river.

"You like Lushenham?"

"Pretty well; it suits us—it's quiet. Charming family at the Vicarage," said she, looking out of the corner of her left eye, but seeing nothing on Tom's face, who knew nothing of the Partingtons. "Charming people; such girls! Ah! you'll see one of them ride some day; and so good-looking."

Tom, never having seen the young lady in question in the saddle or out of it, made no sign. They were within ten minutes' ride of the village on the main road. The clock was striking four. The children were

just out of school. Tom's coat attracted the attention which it always demands in that part of England; and as good luck would have it, those of the population who were not on the road were up at their windows. Tom and the widow were making a triumphal entry, if they had known it; and the Prince of Wales and the Princess Alexandra may raise more enthusiasm, but they won't be subject to the same spirit of speculation. The very first couple to be seen coming along the road was no other than the Vicar and his wife, accompanied by a daughter, in a hat that made a four o'clock November's sun just sinking behind the clouds in a yellow vapour look like a poached egg in pea-soup. The Vicar, as in duty bound, made a polite bow; but he was not of that race of gentlemen who care to take off their hat, when something short of that ceremony answers the purpose. There is a great deal in a bow; and if you wish to stand well with the women, take care that it be a well-considered mixture of deference and self-respect; not so easy of

accomplishment as some persons imagine. If, indeed, a master of the science—a shade of H. M. G. Majesty George IV., or Sir Charles Grandison—would revisit the earth, and compile for Messrs. Chapman and Hall a really scientific pamphlet on the subject, to be launched from Piccadilly into St. James's-street, it might benefit society, by instructing its junior members. I, for one, believe in the utility of the fine old-fashioned, much-abused hat; and if it have no other use, it at least enables a man to bow like a gentleman. It is about the only article of dress that keeps the world in order; and thanks to Providence, it must flourish as long as woman insists upon being recognised in Pall Mall as she should be. Figure to yourself the miserable wretch who seizes his slouched wide-awake by the brim, to droop hopelessly in his raised hand; or the pork-pie of still more modern date by the centre, to drop it, extinguisher-like, upon the same spot from which he has but now taken it. Surely all his hopes of success with woman must be under it, and are put

out at once. The notion may appear preposterous, the advice from a bald-headed old gentleman gratuitous or interested; but, depend upon it, the thing to appear in as a gentleman or lady (on horseback) is a chimney-pot. The rest are all adaptations from the coalheaver, and are miserable subterfuges for a parsimonious economy under the name of comfort. Tom himself knew perfectly well what was right; and he regarded the broad-brimmed, badly-brushed beaver of the Vicar as only too heavy for the arm of its owner. He stared at his parish priest with something like surprise; but he was brought up in too good a school to have recognised any living soul short of the Royal Family without a special introduction.

"Forward minx!" said Mrs. Partington, when out of hearing. "So she's picked him up already. Have you called, Daniel?"

"Called! Oh! yes; last Friday. He wasn't at home; but I walked round the house, and just looked at the rooms. Got some nice things: oh! yes, very."

"You might ask him and his friend to dinner at once, I should think. Don't you expect your friend Simpson? he's a great horseman."

"Certainly; if you wish it, dear. Yes, to be sure, his father kept dogs—setters, or beagles, or something of that kind, to be sure. Bit o' fish, soup, and a saddle of mutton. Capital bottle of claret: '48."

"You told me 36," said the Gorgon, rolling her eyes at this palpable mistake.

"36; yes, to be sure, 36 shillings; but it's '48 wine."

"Then I'd rather not drink much '48 wine," said the lady.

By this time Tom and his charge had got to the second group, which consisted of half-a-dozen village-school children, just released. Their spirits were proportionably buoyant, and, except pulling their forelocks to the big folks at the Hall, and not "sniffling" when the ladies were present, their manners, at the best, were not quite up to the Rosherville pattern: they expressed themselves unreservedly.

"Billy, here comes the 'unters. My! wot a swell! and he's got a woman 'unter along with him! Oh! shouldn't you like to be him?"

"No I shouldn't; I'd like to be she, 'cos she's the best looking."

"But that's the chap as lives in Farmer Simcox's old house. Arn't he a lot o' tin? that's all," suggested Bill, who appreciated the sinews of existence.

"So it be; and that's his wife!" "Hooor-o-o-o," shouted Bill and his companions, as they escorted the couple about fifty yards down the road.

The next persons they met were Captain Gladwish and his daughter in a small pony-chaise at a foot's pace. They stopped.

"Well, Mrs. Greystoke! had a good run? I'm sure I hope so, for your sake."

Tom looked silently on.

"Oh! I'm not very enthusiastic, you know," replied the widow lady.

"The most thorough sportsman in the county," said the Captain again, not understanding this sudden depreciation of the character. "I hope you kill'd your fox."

"And how are you, my dear Miss Gladwish?" said the widow to Emily, bent on changing the conversation. "Not afraid of the rain for Captain Gladwish? We have had a sharp shower, and my horse is lamed. We have left him behind with my groom, and this gentleman is so good as to take charge of me."

Tom took off his hat, and Mr. Gladwish addressed an inquiry or two as to the run, and whence he was hunting.

"What! Simcox's old cottage; the Château, as it used to be called? Capital quarters. I hope you'll like Lushenham, as I hear you have it on a lease." After a few more words, and a promise to call, if Tom would excuse his getting out, they parted.

"Mother! mother! here come the hunters —quick! My! if there ain't the new gentleman along with Mrs. Greystoke." And old Betty Dibdin hobbled to the window in hot haste after her daughter Sally.

"Ah, there they be, sure enough! and a pretty couple they'd make, Sally."

"Lor'! mother, she ain't fit for the likes of him. She's no great shakes, I'll be bound. Why! Mary Duster told me as they kept the gin in the cupboard and helped themselves; and as to her beauty, I don't take no account o' that, for she got a bit of Rowley's Mekissor, and Dainty-face, I think they calls it, and such like powder and things. Lor' bless you! she's only a painted doll after all."

"Well, he ain't no ways well-favoured hisself, Sally; though he looks like a rale gentleman, he do; and my! what a big ring he's got on his finger!"

"Bless your old eyes, mother, that's the top of his hunting whip! But he is a gentleman, for he gave little Tommy a shilling for opening the gate."

The fact is, he not only gave Tommy Dibdin a shilling; but Sally, who was the belle of the village, received a salute, as she was doing some extra work at the Château, one morning, shortly after their arrival. No wonder she was loud in her praises of the gentleman, and no wonder

the use of tooth-powder and gin-and-water came under Sally's strictures, as regards the lady. Women will be women, all the world over.

As soon as it was clearly ascertained that Tom and his friend were positively in residence, of course visitors began to make their appearance; for, becoming remarkably regular in their attendance at church, and paying a very uncommon amount of respect to the platitudes of the Rev. Daniel Partington, not any excuse could be found for excluding such exemplary characters from the visiting lists of the neighbourhood. It is true that, from the peculiar calls upon two hunting men, who had now increased their studs to four and six respectively, no very great regularity in returning these visits, or in accepting the invitations, which poured in upon them from the villages about, as well as their own, could be expected. A lame horse and a non-hunting day in each week put in requisition the only fly in Lushenham, and then the visiting was done, *en masse*. Sometimes Crackenthorpe carried a

roll of cards; at another time Munster; and if a speculative invitation arrived for both, they generally took it in turns, or tossed up for the pleasure of reconnoitring the ground. Tom justly observed that life was too short for bad dinners and ugly women; and, as they took care that their own *cuisine* should be faultless, to their own mind at least, and as the '44 tap of claret was better than ordinary, it was no great hardship to dine at home after a hard day. The dining out after a day's hunting, excepting with a purpose capable of keeping one awake, is a barbarous custom. Persons of a certain age can have no excuse in the way of obligation, extraordinary company, or equally extraordinary cooking and claret. Young men in a state of somnolent spoonyism are an exception to every rule. I have driven from Oxford to Leamington and back between 4 p.m. of one day and 6 a.m. of the next for a single waltz, and thought myself highly rewarded by the possession of a glove with only three fingers and an apology for a back. A few years afterwards I ascer-

tained, upon comparing notes, that the thumb and the little finger, with a few extra strips, was in possession of a fellow who lived in the back building of Trinity, and who eventually made her Mrs. Buddicombe. Of course, I sent him the pieces.

Well, then! sooth to say, both Thomas Crackenthorpe and his *filius Achates* were in this state, more or less, before long; and it must be their excuse for a consumption of ecclesiastical muffins and tea, otherwise disgraceful in the extreme. Considering the parsimonious habits of Mrs. Partington, the two gentlemen were wonderfully welcome to a second day's table-cloth, which had been smoothed between the family Bible and three heavy volumes of a county history, and some watery soup. Fowls and bacon and a roast joint, not forgetting the 36*s.* claret, never found such worshippers before. At first came the invitation in due form to meet Simpson, who would talk of nothing but his father's beagles and his own pony.

"Once was a hunting man; fine country

round Brighton," said he, "Devil's Dyke an awful place: positively hawful."

"Have you been down it?" asked Tom.

"Not exactly, not exactly; but very nearly so—that is, I've been to the top, and looked down."

Then, as the winter got on, and Miss Matilda had been out hunting with her cousin the Bashi-Bazook, and sometimes with a little brother, and sometimes with Mrs. Greystoke, whom it was desirable to keep in good-humour on this account, the intimacy increased. The widow was asked occasionally, to make things go off agreeably, at a moment's notice. Then, when not invited, it was curious to a spectator to see how often she happened to drop in of an evening. Tom occasionally dropped into Captain Gladwish's cottage, to entertain him and to smoke a cigar. Mrs. Greystoke was more cautious in her movements there, and if present always made love to the Captain. Ever since their first meeting, Tom had improved the acquaintance wonderfully. Somehow or other, the widow wanted

advice about her horses; or would Mr. Crackenthorpe mind her man coming up to the Château? and then Tom was always ready to come down to the stable. Then he couldn't help walking into the house. Then he sat down. Then he called, carrying Bobby with him, as a makeweight; and once he found the widow with the piano open, having seen him making that way, and a tune followed, then a song (at which the lady was, for an amateur, no mean adept); and so the intimacy increased, until old Mrs. Dibdin's idea that they would make a pretty couple became a prevalent notion in many quarters. It is but due to the widow to say that she behaved admirably; and that she had toned down her riding propensities to meet Crackenthorpe's ideas of female propriety.

Hunting about four and sometimes five days a-week, with an occasional week's frost, does not leave a great deal to recount. Tom enjoyed himself, and so did the widow: and as often as Mrs. Partington would give

her consent, and Mr. Partington the grey, Matilda appeared at the near meets, in a costume which varied with her capabilities of imitation, or the state of the wardrobe. The attractions of this young lady were by no means in themselves despicable; and a very curious piece of information, which gained ground in the village, that she had a something, an indefinite few thousands of her own, left by her grandmother, proved a loadstone strong enough for Bobby Munster. They were not unfrequently thrown out together; and Bobby, never remarkably keen, began to bear these disappointments with even more than his wonted equanimity. The housekeeping at the Vicarage, never first-rate, did not trouble him; and the Vicar pushed on with his 36*s.* claret and his 27*s.* port, his tough mutton and second day's table-cloth, about once a-week during the season, with muffins *ad libitum* between whiles. All this time the young lady was getting deeper and deeper in the mire. Mamma began to surmise, and she went

the length of an ogrelike smile to Emily Gladwish, when the name of Munster was accidentally coupled with Miss Matilda. Bobby was quite taken with the bait; and having nothing to do but hunt and make love, he indulged the propensity, as if he had been still at Pumpington. There's great wisdom in numbers. Here she had it all to herself; there were no distractions; and, as the Vicar and his wife were quite convinced of the solvency of a young gentleman with four horses, an elaborate toilet, and a part owner of the charming cottage, furniture, and articles of *vertu*, with which it was fitted, it seemed as if there only wanted a proper time for the consummation to the young people's happiness.

"Tom, we must have a dinner," said Bobby Munster, who was in high spirits, consequent on the receipt of an unexpected remittance.

"Who the deuce ever dreamt of going without?" Tom was just preparing to dress, preparatory to that important meal.

"I mean that we must give Partington and two or three fellows a dinner, who have been civil to us."

"Certainly: and we can ask old Sparkes from Pumpington, and your friend Cutpurse, the money-lender—"

"Oh! hang Cutpurse! he won't do," said Bobby Munster.

"Why not? Well, then, we must have him alone," said Tom.

"He's such a dreadful blackguard," rejoined the other.

"You forget the valuable shooting he let us have for next to nothing: we owe him a mount. Billy Drinkwater's been keeping Acheron for him: he won't let any one have a ride till the lawyer has been up."

"Well, then, let's have him down directly. What are you going to do to-night?" asked Bobby.

"I think I shall smoke a cigar after dinner; will you?"

"Why—to tell you the truth, I half-promised to take up those views of the

Rhine for old Partington to see: he seems very much interested in photography."

Tom chuckled to himself; and when he was gone, slipping into a pea-jacket, he soon found himself at Mrs. Bransby's fireside.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PUMPINGTON.

WITHOUT professing violent sympathies with the agriculturists, who always know what is best for themselves, frost is a very useful ingredient in the atmospheric mixture. The fact is, that if one listened to the farmers, one's notions of Providence would be much deteriorated. There never comes the right thing in the right place; and if Providence listened to them there would come such an amalgamation of rain, snow, frost, heat, drought, and wind all together, as to spiflicate Murphy, and blow Admiral Fitzroy and his theories clean out of the ground. The prevalent notion among them is, that the whole of the habitable globe is of the same texture, and that the expression of a meteorological want or opinion by any

one else is a miserable impertinence. Weather was made for crops, and crops for weather; croppers are quite another thing. Lame horses, overworked hounds, short studs, and gentlemen with broken collar-bones, or love affairs on hand, are not interesting to any but the parties immediately concerned; and, though a frost may come opportunely enough for these, it never sounds orthodox to sport that opinion.

Impressed with that idea, when Mr. Crackenthorpe rose, and found his sponge imperfectly stuck to the side of his basin, he pondered as to how far he was at liberty to condemn the providential arrangement. He went for safety.

"By Jove! Bob, here's a go!" said he, flourishing a razor, and preparing to suffer that torture which the well-dressed Englishman formerly considered an essential, and which Tom had not yet discarded. "It's a frost."

"So much the better," said Munster from another room: "I shan't get up."

"But perhaps it will give by twelve o'clock."

"Not a bit of it: the wind's north-east; besides, it's just what was wanted."

"I don't see that, exactly."

"I do; all my horses are lame, and two of yours are no better; Flowerpot's dead amiss, and Acheron's tender all over."

"Well! what shall we do? We can't stick here. It's a beautiful morning." Here he stepped into a good warm dressing-gown, and appeared at Bobby Munster's door.

"Come, turn out, old fellow; let's go to Pumpington."

"What! to pay old Sparkes's bill? Not I." And here the gentleman folded an extra piece of clothing over his head, to shut out all further conversation.

Crackenthorpe continued his toilet, trusting to better influences than his own eloquence to move his friend.

In the course of another hour or two they managed to have breakfast, and then the "*ordre du jour*" was read. Pumpington

by train, a visit to the Repository, luncheon at the 'Prince Regent,' the club, billiards or pool, a dinner (par hazard), an evening, and—

"Oh! put up something, and let's sleep there; as to coming back with the thermometer 6 degrees below freezing point, it's not to be thought of."

"Very well; and just write a line to Thoroughpin, the dealer, and say I don't want the steeplechaser he offered me for the Lushenham Handicap—that's a good fellow. Did you ever see such a letter as this?—

'Coach and Horses Inn.

'Honer'd sur—I has one hors would suit any gent, he has been steeplechased, is sound, and a good hack, best legs and feet you ever see, not in the stud-book, well up to 8 st. 12 lbs., very fast; price 250 guineas. If you don't have him, I shall keep him for the flat. ['Who's he?' said Bobby, soliloquising.] Please come and see him.

'Yours to command,

'Joseph Pimpleton.'"

"What a nice weight-carrying hunter he'll make when we've finished with him

for our game! You don't mean to refuse such a valuable offer?"

"Indeed I do though, Bobby; so write a line, and we'll be off. There's that fellow Jolly has written to ask me to see him. I want to enter something for Pumpington, if I could get hold of a really good one, and he tells me that it would be a great advantage if gentlemen would call upon him and talk the matter over."

Tom got up and looked out of window. It was clear, sunshiny, and unmistakeably frosty.

Jolly was a most respectable tradesman, a top-boot manufacturer, and otherwise given to the sports of the field. He had become lessee of the Pumpington race-course: and he saw a short cut to fortune by steeplechase handicapping, which set all boot and shoemaking at defiance for celerity and certainty. Nothing delighted him so much as a young man with plenty of money and pluck, bent upon buying experience. Jolly had a large stock of the article upon hand, and lost no opportunity of exposing

his wares. I don't know that it was dearer than elsewhere: and he had plenty of customers.

As neither Crackenthorpe nor Munster were yet contributors to a fashionable journal, they found themselves neither inconvenienced by too much attention or curiosity, nor compelled to put up with the patronage or company of a duke on their short journey to Pumpington, and they reached the town without suffering from any incident worth mentioning.

The stroll up the Parade at Pumpington was familiar to both gentlemen: cheerful at all times; and on a bright, frosty afternoon, when the sun has already acquired some power, exhilarating beyond expression—let us add between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Exhilaration beyond that time of life depends chiefly on practical benefit, in which the Pumpington Parade is somewhat deficient.

"Who's this, Munster, coming down in pink? he's been out hunting, and just discovered it wouldn't do. *Couleur perd*, as

that scoundrel used to say at Wiesbaden, when he swept in our money."

"That's Smith."

"Curious name."

"Well, his is," said Bobby; "look at him when he comes by; that's Dudley Greville Falconberg Smith; he says he's the last of the Falconbergs; it's a devilish lucky thing that the family's extinct. I hope he's not going to perpetuate it."

"What does he do here?" inquired Tom Crackenthorpe, who was absorbed in a contemplation of the gentleman above-mentioned; "he looks like the biggest fool alive, at least for his size."

"What does he do? Well, he goes out hunting when there's a frost; and at other times he's taken your place, rather. The women say he's the very nicest man in Pumpington."

"I should think he was; but just look at him."

The last of the Falconbergs was certainly one of those imbeciles who exist in watering-places and spas, as the tame lions of society.

His face was very pretty: thin nose, drooping lids, excellent teeth, wavy hair, and the tiniest of moustaches, just turned at the end. He was about 5 feet 6 inches in height, had very knocked-knees, brittle-looking feet and hands, and weighed about 8 st. 6 lbs. In dress he was of the Dresden china pattern, be-frilled and be-ruffled and be-jewelled, all in the small way. He was not ill-educated —that's to say, as times go; he spoke French with a tolerable accent, and quite grammatically, which had been taught him by his mamma. He sang Italian songs, and understood one or two of them. Of any classics he was sublimely ignorant, so tender a plant having never been transposed from the domestic hot-house to a school of any kind. His manners were a mixture of the playful kitten and the overgrown schoolgirl; and his attention to old women of title, his respect for rank and years, was exemplary. He had ten thousand a-year, and spent four; he had a few horses, which he couldn't ride, nor his friends either when they came to their full size; and his great

pride, next to his finger-nails, was in his cuisine. A dinner of Falconberg Smith's was a very good thing.

This young man was a bone of contention in Pumpington in various ways: between the nice amiable young men, who imitated him, and ate his dinners, and took care of him, and the roystering blades, Jack Halston and his followers, who rode over dining-room tables, ran up to town in a frost, had grilled bones and a bishop nightly, and were always being blown up by the masters of hounds whom they delighted to patronize; between the mothers of Pumpington, who caressed him in secret, and pooh-poohed him to one another, and who paraded him before their daughters as a sort of pump-room koh-i-nor; between the fathers and the sons, the former of whom held him up as an example when they heard of his thrifty habits and domestic inclinations, when the latter abused him for his abhorrence of big fences and Hudson's regalias; and, above all, between the young ladies themselves. They scarcely loved him quite

as well as their mammas; but there were not more than half-a-dozen that wouldn't have been tempted by mammon. The Sparkeses worshipped him, all of them; the Bulrushes adored him; the Flanigans made slippers and braces for him; and Georgy Biffin, the high-churchwoman of the upper town, stuffed him a cushion and worked a cross upon it for him to kneel upon when he turned his face to the east. There were just half-a-dozen sensible souls, who did not dislike ten thousand a-year, but who did not care for an ass saddled with it. Gertrude Thompson, Annie Lawrie, Violet Fane, and Helen Somerville snubbed him, and were thorns in his side; and Harriet Temple called him a humbug and an idiot; but Harriet was suspected of smoking, and was known to have driven a drag, so that Falconberg Smith was more of a lady than she.

The club at Pumpington was a pleasant rendezvous. In the lower rooms Bustleton read his paper, Torkington chatted with his friends, young Listless had all the novels of the day, and General Growler cursed the Horse Guards and their examinations, with-

out let or hindrance from his wife and daughters. The Pumpington correspondent of the *Morning Post*, and the sporting contributor to the—the, what shall I say?—the *Saturday Review*, wrote their articles on club material. Above was the smell of tobacco; short whist, but plenty of it; écarté and billiards from early in the forenoon to any time in the morning. Here were to be learnt the most astonishing performances of the first-flight men; how Sandman's horse had jumped a lane comprising donkey-cart and gipsies; how Jones's buggy had cleared the turnpike-gate, and nothing hurt but Jones—to be sure, he was killed; how Vansittart's pony had jumped through the upper panel of his stable-door, and only dropped an eyelash in going through. Here were mysterious hints as to the Unknown, and an offer to take long odds that he was in the room that day between the hours of 3 and 9 p.m.

It was in these jovial chambers that matches, and bargains, and dinners, and steeplechases were made. It was the only place in Pumpington where everybody

seemed quite at home, the sort of shooting-jacket and easy-chair of the whole Spa. Whether it was attributable to the absence of our better parts, I can't say. But I know everybody listened to the most extravagant fables, the most unmerciful badinage, the most antiquated of Joe Millers, or the last and best of Merewether, without a contradiction. Everybody laughed, and everybody talked of himself, except half-a-dozen eager expectants, who backed the écarté or whist-players with as much joviality and chaff as if Sayers and Heenan had been requiring their services.

As honorary members of this society, both Crackenthorpe and Munster enjoyed the *entrée*.

"Ha! ha! delighted to see you, my dear Crackenthorpe, once more among us: bless my soul! dine with us? and you too, Mr. Munster. Egad! how charmed Mrs. Sparkes and the girls will be! Seven o'clock: quite a family party; no one coming but Falconberg Smith."

"Very kind of you; but the fact is we're

engaged. We're only here for a day or two." Tom did violence to his own feelings to escape from Smith.

"Well, come to-morrow then. There; it's a hard frost; no chance of hunting. I'll just ask Halston and Somerville. One more glass of the '44 left." And Sparkes's long nose, starched choker, and well-polished boots looked so hospitable, that no one would ever believe in the bill he sent in to his dear Crackenthorpe for his friendly interference in the matter of the house. By the way, never have anything done by a lawyer under the name of a friend. Let him come like a wolf, then you understand him; but don't let him feed on your vitals, under the mask of friendship. There are plenty of them, very excellent men; they do their work, and should be paid for it; but their friendship is exceedingly dear. Crackenthorpe had found it so.

"Hallo, Cracks!" said Halston, arriving at this moment. "Well, Bobby, we heard of your shooting. Infernal scoundrel that Cutpurse!"

"What! do you know him, too?" Munster hardly thought there were two persons so unfortunate as himself.

"Know him? I should think so. I had the same bit of sporting on pretty much the same terms. Where do you fellows dine?"

Jack Halston, who ran away with Clara Jones and married her, and had since found out that the levanting was a sheer act of supererogation, was here "on his own hook," as he expressed it; having left his wife in a suburban villa for a week. "There's the cleverest fellow here you ever saw—a Mr. Sharp, an electro-biologist, or some such thing; he sends fellows to sleep, and then makes 'em dance and sing, and play the fool, and say the most outrageous things in the world. We'll go and see him to-morrow evening."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Short of time."

"Oh! that's it, is it? Dine with me, and we'll go together. You must see this

fellow. There's a grocer's boy here that's what they call a medium; he told us the night before last what old Bulrush had had for dinner. Cold shoulder of mutton and a baked potato, while the old fellow was describing a delicious salmi to Tom Naylor. He says Parson Golightly's hair is a wig; and that Harriet Temple was eight-and-twenty, and going to be married to Edward Graham."

Here Crackenthorpe looked out of window, and saw that it was thawing; there could be no doubt about it; and here was he wasting his time in Pumpington. "Telegraph for the horses?" Of course he would; and so he did, and determined to see the —— shire at Sir Shakesby Somerville's the day after to-morrow. A real Pumpington meet is a great thing to see, and though not first-class as sport, made a pretty diversion for Mr. Crackenthorpe and his friend.

In the mean time the mesmerizer had made a great sensation.

"Bedad, Cracks, my boy," said Captain O'Brian, suspending operations with the

cue, "ye must see him, and feel him, to appreciate him."

"Cursed humbug!" said Growler, which was accepted as slight praise rather than otherwise.

"Something in it, something in it, after all!" exclaimed young Sceptic, the new practitioner, diving his hands into his pockets, and squinting through his spectacles.

Smith said, "It was vewy extwaordinawy, weally; shouldn't like him to feel his head."

"He'd feel a long time without finding much in it," retorted young Stamp, of the 14th Plungers; at which rather broad remark Smith smiled blandly. Old Priestly, the rector, anathematized him high and low; and the younger clergy held up their hands in silent horror at his proceeding—"manifestly the works of the devil." In a word, the sensation was great, and that was the object of the advertiser.

'Forty-four claret, if you take enough of it, is apt to produce peculiar sensations with most men. On the evening of the mesmeric

performance Jack Halston and his friends had been indulging pretty freely; and though it left them sober enough, in the strict sense of the word, still it had brought out the characteristic qualities of each. Halston nearly induced the waiter to stand up to him for five minutes, at about a shilling a minute, before leaving the hotel; Crackenthorpe indulged in a series of "tally-ho's" and view-hallos, of different kinds; and Munster exhibited such a latent taste for practical joking, as to have bonneted two mild-looking gentlemen on the way, and to have sent a policeman in search of a loose donkey, which had found its way on to the pavement at the top of the Parade. As he justly observed, upon a remonstrance, "if he doesn't find several, it will be the first time in my life that the place has been free from them at this hour."

In these remarkably good spirits, having turned down one street and up another, they arrived at the room set apart for such entertainments. It was very large, quite full, and admirably lighted. All the aristo-

cracy of the town, and a little of the country, were already present, and Mr. Sharp was just about to begin. There, in the front seats, were the Sparkeses, and the Bulrushes, the Joneses, and young Falconberg Smith, with a few of his followers; and on the other side was the strong opposition party of jovial middle-aged fathers and mothers, your steeplechasing fast young fellows, and the independent girlhood of Pumpington. There was an Irish peer, of only moderate means, with a daughter, now past mark of tooth; two baronets, one a recent importation from some West Indian property, where he had lived all his life; two or three cavalry officers, an imbecile honourable, a physician, and the scientific sceptics, who were come to be convinced, of course. Everybody was in a fever of impatience; and as soon as Crackenthorpe, Halston, and Munster had taken their places, a red-headed gentleman, with a portentous beard, and calling himself Philip Sharp, Esq., F.R.S., A.S.S., F.S.A., came forward in an elaborate shirt-frill, and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and Gentlemen"—but I need hardly take my reader through the intricacies of electro-biology, magnetism, mesmerism, and spirit-rapping. Every one knows how remarkable are its phenomena, and how palpably they bear the impress of truth. He directed their attention to the facts elicited by Dr. Elliotson, Baron Dupotet, Mr. Hare Townsend, and a few other great practitioners. He said a great deal about "cerebro-spinal centres, and the respiratory and muscular systems," and compared them with the "hypothesis of nervous fluid, influenced by extraneous volition;" with a few other little phrases of that kind, which prove clearly that the devil is a great master of the English language, if he is nothing else. The scientific shook their heads, the women trembled, and the scorners only kicked one another under the seats, and wondered "how the Professor's teeth felt after that last jawbreaker." There could be no doubt in his mind that the age of miraculous power had not yet passed away. And if a wooden-legged table could be made to

dance a reel with a kitchen dresser, there was nothing very extraordinary in seeing a natural cripple assume his just proportions under its influence; if ignorant people were enabled to read the contents of a letter through half-a-dozen sealed envelopes, it was not extraordinary that gentlemen of education should be compelled, in a state of somnolency, to describe their own peculiar feelings, as well as those of other people with whom they are *en rapport*; and if they can be taught to forget their own names, homes, and existences, and assume the names and idiosyncracies of other people, it is not remarkable that they should be capable of giving a correct and authentic account of people, places, and circumstances which belong to quite another planet. "In fact, ladies and gentleman," concluded this very free-and-easy and rather good-looking professor of the black art, "I shall be able to show you persons this evening unknown to me, but known to yourselves, under every degree of mesmeric influence, from the

highest intelligence to the most hopeless state of idiotcy, and which can be induced and dissipated by my will." "Now, ladies and gentlemen," resumed this modern necromancer, after a pause, "I shall show you at once something inconceivable to the unenlightened. I am a stranger here, comparatively, having had but some half-dozen evenings. But there is a certain Mr. Box who is peculiarly susceptible, so much so, that I can bring Box to me at any time or place by simple volition. "Is Mr. Box here to-night?"

"Yes," said a cheerful voice at the further end of the room, which was immediately followed by a scuffling of feet, and the elevation of a very stupid face, and rather a dirty one.

"Now, Box, resist if you can."

Box endeavoured to get out at once, of course; but, not succeeding with that alacrity which he had shown on former occasions, Mr. Sharp got alarmed, and again invoked him.

"Come, Box, why don't you come, sir?"

"Cos this 'ere young 'ooman's petticoats won't let me."

But whether Box at that moment heard the chink of a half-sovereign or not, we can't say; we only know that, with his eyes wildly glaring at Sharp, he made his rush, and he went down the length of the room at such a pace, that when he reached the platform he caught his toe in the top step, and fell head foremost into the pit of Professor Sharp's stomach, doubling him up and grassing him at once.

"There," said he, when he got his wind again, "that's a power of attraction seldom seen to such an extent. Sit down, Box, and go to sleep immediately." Box almost snored.

"Such is the power of science," said he, pointing to the slumbering imbecile; but whether he meant his own or Box's was never determined. Then came an invitation to any gentlemen to present themselves for experiment; and about twenty of all sorts made their way to the platform, where a

sufficiency of seats was found for their accommodation.

"Will you go, Tom, if I do?" asked Munster with a sobriety of voice which belied his sensations.

"To be sure I will," said Cracks, who felt inclined for anything; "come along, Halston."

"Not I," said Jack; "I'm deuced near asleep already: I'll stop and dream here."

Meantime Box was put through his evolutions. He laughed and cried, was ordered to feel hot, and got all his clothes off, excepting his trousers, which were kept on by the Professor shouting—"All right, Box!" who returned to his ordinary senses and temperament, until he was ordered to feel cold, when he shivered, and, after rolling himself up, under the steps of the platform, set light to the tails of his coat in warming himself at the candles. He fought the Professor as Heenan, and, fortunately for that gentleman under the influence of Mesmer, missed all the upper cuts. He sang a song in his sleep on the subject of one George

Barnwell, which commenced in a sufficiently lugubrious manner, but which was becoming so exceedingly lively towards the third or fourth verse that the Professor was compelled to shout "All right, Box!" to save the credit of his performance, with Mr. Falconberg Smith and the young ladies of the party; and he drove a team down the steps of the dais, and upset it in the lap of fat Mrs. Purvis, who sat in the front row. The would-be coachman was, however, woke up this time by a regular nose-polisher from Purvis himself, a sceptical grocer of six feet two, and weighing some sixteen stone, who added a word of advice, in which "infernal humbug" was easily distinguishable. Box did not go to sleep again that evening—on that side of the room at least. As Professor Sharp came along the line, making passes with his hands down this man's face, squeezing the temples of that, and turning the eyelids of a third inside out, it occurred to both Crackenthorpe and Munster that they had seen something very like that face before. Munster avowed as much; Cracks,

resolutely bent on not going to sleep, took less notice, and was shortly dismissed as an incorrigible wide-awake, with several more. Half-a-dozen remained on the platform in various attitudes of profound repose, and, strange to say, Bobby Munster himself, among them, was at length caught napping. No one who knew him, or rather who did not know him very well, could have believed it possible that he could have looked so sublimely idiotic. He was no great beauty, but deficiency of brains was not the characteristic of his physiognomy.

To a close observer, as Mr. Sharp advanced along the row of the seven sleepers, a look of surprise and a certain hesitation of manner might have been observed when he stood opposite Crackenthorpe and Munster. He recovered himself immediately, however —not before he detected an irrepressible desire to laugh in the face of the latter. He regarded it as a good sign, and, as we have just said, Crackenthorpe was sent back, and received in congratulatory folds of crinoline on his presence of mind, whilst Munster

remained as a very promising medium on the platform.

After several antics of the same fashion as those of Box by various young men, who had all seen Professor Sharp for the first time, of course, and with whom there could be no possible collusion, he called upon our friend Bob.

"This gentleman is a stranger to me."

Here Bobby opened his eyes, and almost winked; however, he refrained from unseemly merriment, either from his devotion to science, or his respect for his audience.

"What is your name, sir? Speak out, if you please."

"Munster," replied our friend, cheerfully and audibly enough.

"Are you a native of Pumpington, Mr. Munster?"

"Not exactly."

Bobby began to think of the judge and jury, or his friend Mr. Hall and the Bow Street police court.

"Be so good as to close your eyes—quite close. Thank you."

He paused a moment, walked to him, lifted the lids.

"See any green?" said Bob.

The people laughed, and the Professor pressed his hand closely upon his head, where he held it. In a minute or two he said—"I think you stated your name to be Munster. Do you recollect your name, sir, now?"

And he drew his open hand sharply down within six inches of his face. Bobby was silent; and the company, Cracks among them, opened their eyes and ears with curiosity.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Sparkes."

"Where do you live?"

"Pumpington."

"What are you?"

"A flat-catcher."

"What's that, sir?"

"A lawyer," replied the medium.

"What do you feel? what are your sensations?"

"Like the biggest thief in England."

Here there was another round of applause, at Sparkes's expense, in which, however, much to his credit, Munster did not join.

"Be good enough to come to me." Munster didn't move. "Come, sir, you must come. You shall come."

The Professor seemed quite as much in earnest as his medium, who closed his fists, strained his muscles, and stood apparently with some difficulty rooted to the spot.

"Do you see that, sir?"

"Yes," said Bob again, with his eyes as closed as ever; "I do."

"What is it?"

Here the Professor held up a large envelope.

"A woodcock," replied Bobby.

"I call it a letter. So I am disappointed, ladies and gentlemen, this time." And he began to explain the differences of partial or perfect somnambulism, clairvoyance, hellsehen (very improper language, as young Welby the curate remarked to old Mr.

Drinkwater the churchwarden), and allgemein klarheit, or perfect lucidity.

"So do I see a letter, but I see inside it too," said Bobby.

"Ah! Mr. Munster, and what is it?"

"A long bill, a lawyer's bill, or a coachmaker's, I can't see which," said the medium.

"Will you state the amount?"

"Seventy-five pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence; and the name 'Sparkes,' to be sure. I wrote it myself; and very much ashamed of myself I am."

"Bless my heart! ladies and gentlemen," said the Professor, with well-feigned bewilderment, "this is the most extraordinary case of pseudo-identification I ever witnessed; he still thinks himself Lawyer Sparkes, wherever he may be."

"Right, sir!" roared Mr. Sharp.

Bobby was himself in a moment.

"Who are you?"

"Munster, of Ballynahinch."

"And what do you see, Mr. Munster, now?"

"One of the greatest impostors I ever set eyes on," said Bobby, opening his eyes, and staring at the Professor.

The company rose with one accord, a gentle hiss expanded into a prolonged execration, the back benches began to yell, the ladies made a rush for the door; and, just as the excitement was becoming serious, Mr. Sharp made a sudden dive through a door in the back of the platform, and was seen no more. Munster and Crackenthorpe found themselves in the street. "Bobby, I'm going to hunt to-morrow; now, as your horses are lame, I'd advise you to cut it; for it's just possible that you and the Professor may figure in the police-sheet, unless old Sparkes insists upon behaving like a gentleman, and shooting you both. At all events, I'd advise you to go; for you'll be very bad company in Pumpington for the next day or two, at all events."

"You're right, Tom; but I couldn't resist the inclination."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISPLACED CONFIDENCE.

When Tom Crackenthorpe proceeded to make his toilet for Sir Shakesby Somerville's meet, it was curious to observe the care he bestowed upon it, and the different result produced from that which rewarded his exertions on the first morning's hunting in Mr. Bumby's country. No man knew better the distinction between Gorsehamptonshire and Pumpington; and the provincial adornment of his person for the latter might be considered a test of his appreciation of its depth and dirt. Even to his horse the same marked distinction might be observed.

"A good, coarse, ordinary-looking beast, that looks lost without the pole-chains, will do for that country," said he to his man

Billy; and, accordingly, Mr. Drinkwater sent over the brougham-horse, a useful animal, and in good condition—for macadamizing.

"Leathers?" said Tom, soliloquising—"not on any consideration. We must be in what they call a bottom before the end of the day, and it's chiefly red clay—looks like tripe and tomato-sauce." Then he turned over the portmanteau, which had arrived only that morning. "Yes, that's right, the old black coat; quite good enough for these duffers. Ah! here's the breeches; them's the jockeys for Pumpington," continued he, surveying with great satisfaction some dark strong cords, which smelt strongly of Monmouth Street, having been really laid in stock for bog-shooting in Ireland. "Can't do them much harm; and I shan't be mistaken for a Pumpington swell. By Jove! how comfortable they are, after all! Come on," added he, apostrophizing an old boot, which hung fire for a minute; "come on,—you've been this road before pretty often. Now for the choker.

Let's see—no; that's too neat. White! ah, white it must be, after the G— S—'s pattern! Little too much of the church about it, too; high-class clergyman, eh? No; I think the breeches will settle that point. Come, that's not so bad, after all! I wish to goodness I had a neat gaiter now, instead of these brown boots; nothing like a neat gaiter for doing the rough like a gentleman, I do believe," said Tom, buttoning the penultimate button of his dark-checked waistcoat, and preparing to descend. "Never saw a man jump a fence in a pair of gaiters in my life; I wonder how it looks?"

I hardly see the reason for this inconsistency of the upper man with the lower in these sporting matters; yet, true it is, they are in vogue with the best men—

"Ut turpiter atrum,
Desinat in piscem mulier formosa supernè."

And so far from laughing when they behold, our friends applaud it. However, there was Tom Crackenthorpe, looking like

a bum-bailiff going to a prayer-meeting, or a parson about to enact a bum-bailiff; and having swallowed his breakfast, he went into the stables of the 'Prince Regent,' to get on Busy Bee, the famous brougham-horse in question.

"I wonder whether that ass, Mr. Falconberg Smith, will be at this place or not?"

Just then Smith rode by on the very neatest of light-weight carriers, dressed in the pink of fashion, and looking as little like Tom Crackenthorpe as can well be conceived.

"Well, that's a comfort," said Tom; "I flatter myself we shall be known apart."

Just then old Sparkes passed.

"What in the world's he doing down here at this time of day?" thought Tom, tightening his girths. "Oh, I forgot, it's a late meet, so it is; and he's been committing a robbery betimes. By-the-bye, I'd better ask him at once to Lushenham, or he'll think I'm concerned in that fool Munster's performance. There's lots of time; I'll call as I go up."

So Tom mounted the Busy Bee.

"How are you? how are you?—delighted to see you. Come in for ten minutes—plenty of time. Come in and say 'How d'ye do?' to Mrs. Sparkes, and have a glass of her orange-brandy—famous stuff!" said old Sparkes, smacking his lips; "and she'll be quite offended if you don't come in."

So Tom got down, and, surrendering himself to Sparkes and his fate, and the Busy Bee to an incompetent Buttons, he found himself the centre of a very attractive circle.

"My dear Mr. Crackenthorpe," said Mrs. Sparkes.

And the whole family and party plunged at once into the weather, and the intended procession from the Bricklayers' Arms to the Paddington Terminus.

"Mrs. Sparkes, I hope we shall persuade your husband to come over and have a day at Lushenham. I can manage a capital mount for him, and a bed; or, as we hope to have some steeplechases later, I think he may prefer that."

"Really, you're very good, very good. You know," and here the lady giggled hysterically, "Sparkes is entirely his own master. I'm sure it's very kind of you, and—and— Pa, dear."

"My love?"

At this juncture Sparkes straddled into the room, a very Winkle of propriety in costume; white cords (that's the real old jam), white tops, striped waistcoat, checked neckcloth, and bright scarlet coat, unconscious of mud or stains.

"My love," said she, smiling on all around, "here's Mr. Crackenthorpe hopes you'll go to Lushenham; he offers a mount, and all sorts of good things, and you *are* to go."

Had any one seen the "aside" she cast at him, they would have understood that he was to go.

Amelia appeared in the doorway, booted and spurred.

"What! are *you* going?" said Sparkes, evidently quite astonished at this new vision.

"Of course she is, Mr. Sparkes, unless you've some particular objection."

"Only, my dear, that the—the—bay mare's not quite sound, and—"

"Fiddle-de-dee, Sparkes; the bay mare's quite as sound as yourself, I've no doubt;" and the lady again gave him the benefit of both eyes—barrels, I was about to say—in the waistcoat.

"You mean, dear, that the bay mare's the better horse; however, we'll manage. What with Crackenthorpe, and Smith, and Halston, and old Grumbleton, it's hard if I don't find some one to take care of Amelia."

The latter part of this sentence the old gentleman muttered to himself. It is but justice to Amelia to say that, beyond looking at Falconberg Smith and Tom Crackenthorpe, she took no part in the discussion. She was trying to make up her mind—a large parcel. When five or six people have to get on as many horses, with a shortness of hands in the stable department, it takes a few minutes more than is

calculated on. When a lady is of the party, the difficulty is increased. Amelia first forgot her handkerchief; then had got odd gloves, which had to be changed; then was nearly pitched on to the other side of her horse by Mr. Smith, and had to be pushed back by the gardener, to whom this process of propagation was new; and finally lost at least five minutes in adjusting a refractory stirrup, which had been last used by her short-legged friend Patty Blenkiron. Falconberg Smith found her a pin, and Tom Crackenthorpe affixed to her habit a small bunch of violets. In this form they started for Shakesby Court.

Shakesby Court was a very nice place, seven miles from Pumpington. There was not a woman at the Spa who could not have directed you safely to it, and who would not have taken it with all its incumbrances. It was really a very good house, newly built by the reigning baronet. Its woods and glades were the talk of the town at the present time; and its beauties enhanced by the certainty of finding a fox in

them. Towards this centre all the energy of the Pumpington party was directed. No sooner had they quitted the small round stones which enliven the dullest equitation with the hope of lameness or a fall, than the young lady started at what she would have described as a gentle canter. Of course she took the middle of the road, leaving the greasy turf on the side to her suite. It had the advantage of two days' frost and two hours' thaw, and was not the safest ground in the world for a fall. However on they went. Amelia rode a horse of her own; her father a cob, which would not be wanted again for a day or two; Jack Halston his favourite hunter; and Tom Crackenthorpe the only one that he had. Mr. Falconberg Smith had only three horses out, so that it behoved him to be particular about pace. She neither slackened rein, nor drew bit, till she arrived at Shakesby. Tom's horse was in for a good baking, and he swore that should be his last ride with Amelia Sparkes. Let us see what the rest of the party had to say to it.

Old Sparkes had but one object in view —the getting rid of his daughter. He did not object to it for the day, but preferred it for good. He had made up his mind that some one else should ride with her through the run; but whether Smith or Crackenthorpe were the most eligible party he was at a loss to say. At any rate, Smith was the man more easily caught of the two. Amelia herself was in a very comfortable frame of mind, and would have accepted either. Of course she had a preference, but it is not necessary to state it. She was a fine, showy-looking girl, with nerve enough to have tackled Smith himself: and I know nothing so difficult to manage as a fool. But she really liked Tom the better of the two, and preferred Bobby Munster to either of them. She attributed the evening at the electro-biologist's to supernatural influence, and was not disposed to be hard on his talents in a social point of view.

Tom was spoony, but not hopelessly so. He had occasionally drunk out of the same

cup, and had even eaten out of the same plate, and acted the donkey; but he was not past recovery, and counter-irritation was doing great things for him: the widow was a sort of intermittent blister. Mr. Falconberg Smith was desperately in love, far the best match, and his ample fortune was worth two of Crackenthorpe's; for he would never have spent two-thirds, and the other would have managed to get through at least five-fourths of his income. Besides which, dear Falconberg was such a "domestic creature," as Mrs. Sparkes called him; and certainly gave one the idea of an early specimen of the gorilla tribe, caught young, and easily domesticated in the zoological gardens of social life.

Falconberg Smith himself, though in love, was in a hazy state between matrimony and permanent desertion. As he was not in debt, a rapid flight would have settled the first, and have been the natural forerunner of the second. Not having taken either plunge, we have him with us to-day as an attendant cavalier.

"Very nice person—Sir Shakesby," said Amelia Sparkes, "and waltzes deliciously."

"Ya-as," said Smith, and pulled up his collars.

"Not a bad fellow," said Tom, aloud—"selfish beggar!" *sotto voce.*

And so he was. He was one of those naturally self-indulgent men who get everything that is to be got out of their friends at as small a cost of personal inconvenience as possible; and, from a swaggering habit of spending quantities of money entirely upon themselves, have acquired the name of "capital fellows!" They are the very pests of society. With plenty, they are always suggesting extravagant amusements to their friends who can less easily afford them, and are never known to pay anybody's share but their own. Sir Shakesby was never known to say "no" to anything. He went everywhere, and did everything, very jovially and very carelessly; and he never returned a favour or did a kindness in his life that he could possibly avoid. He was a rollicking blade,

always in want of something; always ordering this, that, and the other—cigars, whips, champagne, and jewellery — and sending them to Shakesby Court, where they formed part of an extensive domestic collection.

Once a year, as Sir Shakesby never omitted an opportunity of dining or sleeping in the best houses in Pumpington and its neighbourhood, he found it necessary to give a *set-off*, and he thought the most economical method was to have a late meet of the hounds and a great breakfast; where very moderate gooseberry performed the part of Moet or Clicquot, and at which he was quite sure that two-thirds of his guests would be satisfied with walking into his house and admiring the pictures. Heavy breakfasts are quite gone out of fashion; and when men require jumping powder it is customary to make the cartridge as small as you possibly can. Not to be there, however, and not to be seen at Sir Shakesby's, was to be nobody; and to be nobody at Pumpington was a crime of which few of

the dwellers in that charming city would knowingly have been guilty.

The present was one of these festive occasions. Everybody, men and women, who could be considered on the visiting-list, got off their horses: and half the cads of the county were present, earning honest sixpences and shillings for once in their lives. The Sparkes party, of course, as part of the legal adviser and agent of the baronet, arrived in great form; and Smith and Crackenthorpe were greeted on their arrival with that joyous hilarity which really meant—"Well, here you are, and make the most of it; you won't owe me much if you finish the table. But I'm Sir Shakesby Somerville, and don't mean to be proud. Sit down, old fellow, and have a kidney. Glass of champagne, Smith? Join us, Cracks? Mr. Sparkes, do me the favour to take care of your daughter. Hopkins, tea to Miss Sparkes directly; and see that the servants are taken care of when the hounds arrive." The fact is, that if a man has sufficient courage to be thoroughly self-

indulgent with one hand, and will shake his fellows heartily with the other, he may be member for any county in England. If a man lives like a screw, and wears a threadbare coat, in order to give funds to the county hospital, to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, the world will profit by his liberality, and raise a monument to him when he is dead; but they won't give him a vote while living, and will prefer that young spendthrift, whose uproarious mirth and discriminating generosity have made him a roaring lion out of a golden calf. Money must be spent; and if you want the world to see that it is so, you can't do better than make yourself the recipient of your own bounty.

In the course of an hour or so the rosy gills of the gentlemen and the diminished clatter of plates gave unequivocal notice that the business of the day was nearly over, and the play about to begin. "One more glass, Tippler, and then we'll join the ladies," said Sir Shakesby to a gentleman who had got throgh about half his usual allow-

ance. "It's the dog pack this morning, I rather think," rejoined Tippler, attaching himself still to his champagne, and ignoring the delicate hint conveyed in the invitation to drink. However, as there were plenty there who were heartily sick of the coffee-room, and anxious for the fray, Tippler was in a minority, and the majority rose from the table at once. Then came the usual "one more glass of sherry," or "a trifle of that cherry brandy, just to settle the pigeon pie," and everybody was involved in hunting the beaver. The style of Pumpington hat worn at the cover side by men and women is sufficiently diversified in form to simplify this investigation. There was no necessity for trying half-a-dozen Lincoln-and-Bennets, or Locks, or Chapman-and-Moores, or Andrés, to ascertain which was the right fit. The worst accident that could happen was the possibility that Mr. Smith might have changed pork-pies with Miss Jones, or that Miss Fakeaway's round wide-awake, having been accidentally spoiled of its feather, might find its way on to

little Captain Buggins's head. Beyond this, casualties were impossible. In a very few minutes the guests were mounting their horses, and the host was inspecting the half-dozen of champagne which Mr. Hopkins asserted to be all that remained over and above to those who had drunk. He had forgotten another odd half-dozen that was lying accidentally in a cupboard in the housekeeper's room.

Falconberg Smith had found his groom, and his hunter, a new one, and one of the very best-looking horses out—as indeed he ought to have been for the money. He looked ten per cent. better for the champagne he had drunk ; and as he was scrupulously correct in all his habits, this morning's potations were not without their effect. A seasoned vessel like Tom Crackenthorpe had nothing to regret but the plebeian appearance of himself and Busy Bee, by the side of so much elegance as that of his companions. I forget whether I mentioned a slight stammer as a peculiarity of Smith ; if not, it's worth noticing, as giving a charac-

ter to some of his remarks, and as a dead lock to love-making, on which he was evidently bent. It was not long before Tom was made to understand that he was *de trop*.

"Very nice horse that of yours," at length said Tom, by way of joining a little in the conversation, which had been carried on rather after the *sotto voce* fashion.

"I gave Grimsby three hundred for him," said Smith, hammering away, and rather impeded by champagne in his utterance. "He calls him Sus-sus-sustulit: rather a curious name, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is a curious name. He's not an Italian-bred un', is he?" said Crackenthorpe, eyeing Sustulit with considerable envy.

"No, not that I know of," replied his owner, quite abroad at the classical allusion. You see Smith's was the modern school of education.

"Not much of a Roman nose either," added Tom. "What an extraordinary name!"

"Grimsby christened him—I didn't. He said he called him so because he came from Tollit; but I don't know what he meant."

"Oh, comes from Tollit, does he?" said Tom, suddenly brightening up, with a curious twinkle. "Comes from Tollit? then I know the horse, and I'll tell you really why they call him Sustulit—because he 'lifts' so infernally. Sustulit's the Latin for a kicker."

The last of the Falconbergs turned a shade paler, and Amelia Sparkes followed suit. At that moment toot-toot went the horn; and as the servants galloped past with the pack, and the field set their horses into quicker motion, Sustulit gave a bound or two of satisfaction, much to his owner's discomfort, and to the credit of his own name. Not a bad shot of Tom Crackenthorpe.

Having subsided into himself, the horse once more allowed a little playful badinage to take place between his rider and Miss Sparkes. Of course the old gentleman had got out of the way. Halston and the others

of the original party had sought other pleasures than the delicate eloquence of Mr. Smith. Tom alone remained; and the champagne—that stimulator of the imagination—had called up before his mind's eye the past and the future, to the exclusion of the present.

"Amelia!" sighed Smith.

The fortunate possessor of that name looked away.

"Now it's coming," thought she—"Mr. Smith."

"Why-why-why so formal? Why not Dud-dud-dud——"

"Oh! indeed, I can't. I—I—ought not to—there, then, Dudley!"

Tom was well in front, a couple of lengths, and wondering how he should get away without appearing to do so. There was a fence in front of him, and a gate a hundred yards to the left at the bottom of the wood. The field was going through the gate, and thither Amelia and her lover were sure to wend their way. Good easy souls! they saw neither gate nor

fence. Smith saw a woman, and Amelia saw ten thousand a-year beside her.

"Yes, dearest Amelia! let me tell you now"—[At that moment Cracks went at the fence]—"in the sol-sol-solitude of this gay crowd, how much I lo-lo-lo—wo-ah! gently!"

They were close to the fence, without seeing it; and as the Busy Bee lit safely on the other side of it, Sustulit rushed straight for the same place. The horse stopped short, and Falconberg Smith shot headlong into a ditch four feet deep, and quite full of water. Having safely deposited his master, Sustulit jumped the lot at a stand, and cantered after Crackenthorpe.

As the hounds were not running, there was no lack of assistance and condolence; and when the unconscious Narcissus, who had looked at himself in the water, was dragged out, he was overwhelmed with advice and sympathy. Nobody laughed; it's not the thing to do. Nobody broke silence for a second, until that irreverent Jack Halston exclaimed aloud—

"What are you laughing at, gentlemen? such an accident might have happened to any of us, you know. Bless my soul if it isn't Smith! Dudley, my boy, what have you been doing in the water? You must have got your feet wet." They were the only parts of him which had not been thoroughly immersed. "You'd better go home at once; 'pon my soul you had. You'll catch your death of cold if you stay here. Here comes his horse."

"Amelia," said Sparkes, "you've had enough riding; perhaps Mr. Falconberg Smith won't mind taking charge of you?"

"Not at all—delighted!" said he, chattering as if he'd the ague already. "Where's my horse, stupid brute?"

"I told you what a brute he was," said Tom, bringing him through the gate. "There, jump on mine. I know this fellow; send mine to Prince's stables when you get home. Come up!" said Tom, halloing at Sustulit, and hurrying away from the scene of action; the "Busy Bee will keep you warm, if you only go home a

swing trot; it's about what she's fit for. Dash it! it is a nice horse to sit upon. Now for a run."

Dudley Greville Falconberg Smith was too much astonished to refuse, and too cold to finish his offer on the road home; but a fortnight later Amelia at an at-home got him up to the mark; and she keeps Mr. Falconberg Smith in pretty tidy order up to this day.

Tom liked his mount exceedingly, and paid some well-merited compliments to Mr. Smith's groom.

"Is my horse come in?" said he, on reaching the hotel.

"Yes, sir; some time ago."

"What did Mr. Smith say of him?"

"Didn't see him, sir," said the ostler: "see the stud-groom, sir."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Said he never saw such a brute in his life. His master was so tired with pulling at him, he fainted when he got him up-stairs."

"Order me something to go to the three

o'clock train to-morrow. Why is Mr. Smith here without his nurse?" muttered he to himself, stamping the mud off his boots at the door of his hotel.

The next thing was to see Mr. Jolly; what could he have to say? So Tom performed another elaborate *toilette*. He was determined to propitiate Jolly; so he adorned his lower person with the very tightest-fitting trousers in his wardrobe.

"Well, they do look as if I wasn't to be done easily," muttered he to himself. "They'll wonder how I ever got my feet into them: I didn't put 'em on over my head either," added he, surveying them complacently. "These lace-up boots, too, give a good deal of size to the feet; though buttons are rather more horsey."

Tom Crackenthorpe had made up his mind that an easy way to popularity with the farmers of Lushenham and its neighbourhood was by a steeplechase. Everybody would have a chance of riding over his friend's wheat; so that the foxhunters would have no pull in that respect, and, if it

was but wet, they might hope to do some damage. As to the gentlemen, as long as they were able to put in a horse or two at the finish of the season, they ought to be satisfied ; and a horsedealer's stake would bring out some young ones for the next hunting season. Tom was remarkably green in these matters, and much too honest for the game he had in hand.

There are two kinds of steeplechasing. The first is a good, wholesome, legitimate sport, calculated to improve the breed of horses and of men ; that is to say, if horses are trained to run over a country like that round Lushenham, with about 12 st. to 13 st. on their backs, they will be good weight-carrying hunters, with a turn of speed, if not quite thoroughbred. They will be very serviceable horses to gentlemen who wish to be carried safely and speedily over Leicestershire or Northamptonshire. So thought Tom Crackenthorpe, in his simplicity ; and such he determined should be the conditions of the Lushenham meeting whenever it should take place. He didn't think

much of the difficulties of his undertaking; for, having heard much of this sort of conversation from his friends, he very naturally thought that they would do their utmost to forward their own views, as well as his. "There is but one object in steeplechasing," said he to himself, "and of course everybody hereabouts will promote it. We'll call a committee when we get home."

There is also another view of steeplechasing not altogether in accordance with the previous one. The course selected is to be remarkably unlike a natural country. The fences are to be made very easy, and the weights are to vary, for starters, from 7 st. to 9 st. The variety of ground gone over is to be as much in keeping with this as possible; nothing vulgar or heavy, and ridge-and-furrow is to be especially avoided. Ox-fences and stiff timber are forbidden; but there is to be a moderate imitation of it, in low rails and unsound fences. There is to be a great competition for the friendship of the handicapper, and a relinquishment of all stakes and claims upon him in the event

of the favoured animal pulling it off. This sport is not intended for gentlemen, though they occasionally indulge in it. It is intended for the professional bookmakers, and the possessors of weedy thoroughbreds which have been given up as useless at Newmarket Heath, unprofitable for the hunting field or the stud ; but one of which, delicately handled, is a positive fortune. Tom was ignorant on some of these points, and went to be enlightened. In the dusk of the evening, an hour before dinner, he reached the house of Mr. Jolly.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE GROUND.

"Pray walk in, Mr. Crackenthorpe, walk in, sir; straight on, if you please," said that worthy individual, as he escorted his visitor through a bright, clean, well-lighted saddler's shop, towards a comfortable back-parlour. "Very happy to see you, sir; pray be seated; there, keep your hat on, Mr. Crackenthorpe. Ah! you're not ashamed of your head, I see; when you get to my time of life, sir—eh! And what shall I offer you, sir?—one glass of good old sherry? a present from one of my customers, old Lord Poundington. Not so old either, egad! he won a steeplechase in Ireland only last week." And here Jolly brightened up; that is, as far as the most decent suit of black and a very grave

methodical-looking face would permit. He might have been mistaken for an evangelical missionary, as far as appearances were concerned.

"Thank you, Jolly," said our friend; "I will take a glass of that sherry and a biscuit, for I shan't last till dinner, notwithstanding Sir Shakesby's breakfast."

"Ah! you have been there! Well, for my part, I don't care so much about it. Now, a race-horse, Mr. Crackenthorpe—there is something to look at in a thoroughbred 'un." And the methodistical old humbug sighed.

"There's a good deal more to look at in some of those I saw to-day," said Mr. Jolly's guest, reverting to the unpromising lot which surrounded Sir Shakesby's lawn. "You've spoilt the hunter by your lightweight racing and steeplechasing, Jolly. The thoroughbred ones are only fit to carry your boots, and the half-bred ones the whole of your wardrobe."

"Bless your heart, sir! what does it signify"—and Mr. Jolly's eyes twinkled

at the rich harvests he had made, and which were still in prospect — "what does it signify, about this place, what you ride? And you gents in the shires can always get what you want; leastways, by paying for it."

"Still, I don't see the advantage of having to give a hundred or two more for a thing because you have made it so scarce. That's not what the Agricultural Society would call 'improving the breed of horses.' What we want is a good-bred horse, that can carry a man over a big country without breaking his neck."

"Well, now, what do you call a big country, Mr. Crackenthorpe?"

"Certainly not Liverpool, nor Leamington, nor any made courses whatever; but a good natural four miles of hunting country—say Market Harborough."

"Positively dangerous; indeed it is, sir. There was poor Martyr the jockey's wife in tears all day at the last races; and as to poor Mrs. Dickenson, as soon as ever she saw the brook she went into strong con-

vulsions, and there she's been ever since—so they say, at least." Jolly sighed again, and helped himself and Tom Crackenthorpe to some more of the old brown sherry.

"Martyr and Dickenson are both funkers, and only fit for Liverpool, where you are more likely to be killed, but without thinking of it beforehand. Ask Mr. Bevill his opinion of the Harboro' course, and he'll tell you it's the fairest in England. But now, Jolly, tell me what you want with me about the Pumpington race."

This was so evidently a step in the right direction, that Jolly immediately proceeded to replenish the glasses again; but Tom's modesty was as remarkable as his temperance, and he put in a feeble remonstrance. "Just one more glass; there's not a headache in a butt of it. What we want, you know, is to get the gentlemen of the neighbourhood to patronize us; and as you and Mr. Munster arn't living far off, and you has a taste for this sort of thing, we thought you might give us a turn; 'pon my word, sir, you ought; a great patron of the hunt-

ing-field, and a young man just entering life, as one may say, and a large fortune and a good deal of influence (Tom felt the warm-water trickling down his back), and such a capital judge of all them things (the sensations were growing pleasanter); upon my word, sir, you ought to give us a helpin' hand."

"But what the deuce can I do? What is it you want? I have a nomination."

"You must run a 'oss, you must, indeed, Mr. Crackenthorpe; and we'll make you a steward next year."

Tom felt again a satisfactory sensation, and took another glass of sherry at Jolly's request. In fact, this last hit about the stewardship was a clencher; and the worthy saddler, Clerk of the Course, and Handicapper in Ordinary to the Pumpington Committee had played his last card but one before finishing the game.

Such a flattering suggestion to a young man was likely to make an impression. Foolish people imagine that a stewardship implies the necessity for doing or seeing

things done, which may promote the objects of the meeting; and that the honour is not altogether an empty one. Indeed, men have been known rather to act upon the strength of the names which appear; and to quote my Lord —— and the Duke of —— and Sir —— ——, as guarantees of honest intentions and good management. But we who are behind the scenes know better than this; and sincerely honour old Cracks for his integrity, and laugh at him for his simplicity. Of course he thought that he should assist the county members and half-a-dozen sporting young noblemen in making such reforms as have never been contemplated since the death of the Liberator; and that the name of Crackenthorpe would descend to posterity with those of Lord George, the Admiral, and the gentleman in black, as the greatest benefactors the sporting world has yet seen. Having taken a moment or two to swallow his emotions, and get rid of some natural exultation at such a vision, he proceeded with the conversation:

"Run a horse! and what sort of a horse am I to run? I've nothing fit but a thoroughbred one, and he's a hack."

"Can he gallop, sir?"

"O yes!"

"I presume he's not in the Stud-book?"

"No; but he can't jump, I should think. He's quite unfit for a hunter. He can't carry anything; or, I suppose, we could teach him to jump."

"They'll jump, sir; between ourselves, there's nothing big enough here to upset a donkey; we've made it for the gallopers. So if you've anything that can stay four miles, and carry a fair weight—"

"And what should you call a fair weight?"

"Well, now, h-u-um! that depends so much upon circumstances," said Jolly, balancing each word, and looking down intently upon his thumb-nail, which he just bit, and then admired; "it depends so much upon circumstances. The top weight of course is nominal; the real beginning is at about 11 stone; and if you go for the

stakes, you understand, why, of course, the weight ought to be there or thereabouts; if not, why, of course, it makes all the difference!"

"I don't quite see that," said Tom, somewhat puzzled. "What difference can it make whether I go for the stakes or not?"

"You see, sir, the stakes are worth six or seven hundred pounds, and if your horse is good enough to run for that sum—well, we can't throw him in; if you don't want the stakes, why, then, you see, sir, we could afford to give him a chance?"

"What do you say to 8st. 7lbs.? I suppose a pretty good one couldn't lose?"

"Not very easily, unless there happens to be one equally good, put in at 7 st. 8 lb." Tom began rather to see his way through the mist.

"But what becomes of the stakes? Doesn't the winner take them?"

"Not if he wins under such circumstances as that. Never thinks of asking for 'em; indeed he'd be quite ashamed to ask such a

thing. And if he don't win, the next time he's handicapped his horse goes in for nothing. So, you see, anyhow it's a good thing."

"It's not a bad idea; but I never heard of it before."

"Oh! it's common enough, sir; everybody does it. There's Popham, of Timberville, who handicaps the Grand Patriarchal, lives entirely upon it. It's a good thousand a-year to him. He's a clever fellow, is Popham. All his relations, excepting his aunt, keep race-horses; and the old lady has one of the best ponies in England."

"Do you mean to say that Popham pockets the stakes of the Grand Patriarchal at Timberville?" asked Tom, with a wonderful stare of astonishment.

"To be sure I do," replied Jolly, with an equally surprised countenance at having to discover so much; and McPhail of Nosebury, too. If they didn't do something for themselves, I don't see how they could get on at all."

"And what does the press say?" again

inquired Tom, who had a mighty high opinion of the powers of the fourth estate, and imagined a sporting paper was very little behind the Thunderer in importance.

"Oh! the press is always at 'em; but, Lor'! as long as they sack the money, they don't care about the press. It's always blowing up somebody, and apologising; and telling wonderful stories, first of Lord This and Lord That, and then of Popham and McPhail, just for the pleasure of contradicting itself the next day. I daresay, now, you've seen my name in print before now?" And Jolly put on a look of supernatural simplicity.

"Well, I certainly have; not always in very flattering terms."

"Yes! and I daresay you will again; but it don't hurt me. Besides, they won't say anything very bad of us; for we're pretty liberal, and always give them a turn when we can—at least, the most violent of them. I know a gent as had such a case against Popham, and he tried to print it; but the sporting press was dead against him, to a

man: and the honestest of 'em said, 'Oh! it's all right, Mr. Smith, but it's impossible to print that; for he does give us such breakfasts all the Timberville week: it's impossible, so you must alter it before it goes to press; indeed you must.'"

"Then you want me to do as every one else does, I suppose?" and Tom rose and finished his glass.

"Yes, sir; and if you've got anything good, never mind about the heavy weights at Lushenham; send it here for our handicap: and mind you back it for a place, at all events."

"All right," said Tom, as he put on his hat and walked slowly out of the room, perfectly astonished by the coolness of the proposal. "All right; good morning, Jolly; it must be near dinner-time; that's a good-looking saddle." As Tom was leisurely descending the steps, he turned once more, and said, in a low tone of voice, to Mr. Jolly, who stood on the upper door-step, "And what ought one to back for the Timberville, between ourselves?"

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, I wouldn't touch it at present; it's meant for one of his own lot; but I don't think he's made up his mind yet. He does owe his brother Sam a turn, and I shouldn't wonder if he puts him into a good thing. Good day, sir:" and Mr. Jolly touched his hat civilly.

This conversation made a profound impression upon Tom Crackenthorpe, and much cooled his steeplechasing ardour. He was really a good, honest fellow, fond of the sport. He liked tumbling about himself, and even preferred to see others doing so. He firmly believed in fox-hunting, and everything provocative of it, from the correct breed of terriers to the highest-bred horse in Lord Stamford's stud; and he loved steeplechasing, because he fancied he saw in it a mode for making and encouraging good horses and horsemen. Neither did he object to anything that partook of the nature of fun; and as long as the farmers were satisfied, and their wives and daughters assembled in sufficient numbers, and with a sufficiency of cherry-coloured ribbons, Tom

was happy. The conclusion he arrived at, after considerable meditation on the subject, was, that Mr. Jolly was a great rascal, but no worse than Mr. Popham, and McPhail, and half-a-dozen more; and his final determination to have nothing to do with any of the lot. He was committed to a chase at Lushenham, for the good of the neighbourhood, and to repay the damage which had been done by riding over the crops and grass, and he intended to make it as honest and practically useful as he could. "We'll have a committee meeting as soon as I get back."

In the mean time, old Sparkes had felt so aggrieved by the public attack made on his reputation by Bobby Munster, that he found it absolutely necessary to write to that gentleman, as soon as he had mastered the information which reached him from his good-natured friends on every side. He was not long in concocting an epistle, remarkable for keeping in view a lawyer-like maxim, of never making any one so much of an enemy but that he might again become a friend. The letter was full of regrets: "he regretted

the painful necessity," "the importunities of his friends," "the malice of his enemies." Above all, he felt satisfied that his friend Mr. Munster would be able to account for this "strange hallucination," and to give a denial to all that had been asserted on that occasion. The fact is, that Sparkes still thought that Amelia had a chance with Tom Crackenthorpe, as Mr. Falconberg Smith had not yet proposed; so he withheld all threats of horsewhipping for the present, and held out nothing but the olive-branch.

Now Bob was a very clever fellow, and very willing to look over the insult he had offered to old Sparkes; indeed, it was more a matter of '47 claret and larking than anything else; but how to deny having said what five hundred people heard, or to aver that Sparkes meant Cutpurse or any one but Sparkes, was beyond Bob's ingenuity. He was sorely puzzled for at least a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time he read the lawyer's letter once more, and an inspiration almost divine fell upon him. "Hallucination," said Bob, talking to himself

"strange hallucination: by the piper! that's it—that's just what it was. Here goes—it will delight all the women, and all the parsons who believe in satanic influence, and pacify half-a-dozen lawyers at once. Here goes."

"Lushenham, February 14th, 186—.

"DEAR MR. SPARKES,—

"Your letter has supplied a link in a chain hitherto wanting. I could not ascertain, on my recovery of my senses, what nonsense I had been talking. If any little trifle slipped out injurious to the feelings of any person, more especially of one for whom I have the highest esteem, and whom I have always regarded as a friend, I cannot express my regret in language sufficiently strong. It has always been understood, not only by your excellent Vicar, but by many of your friends, that that mysterious power, under which I was spell-bound, is demoniacal. If anything were required to produce conviction on my own mind of this fact, it would be found in the compulsory falsehoods which it seems I must have uttered under his malignant influence. What renders the case doubly painful is the fact that those falsehoods, like the Father of lies himself, are said to have had an unaccountable

semblance of truth. In the hands of an honourable person, like yourself, this letter will doubtless be most satisfactory, and I can assure you that it will give me great pleasure that you should make any use of it you think best.

"Believe me, &c. &c.,

"ROBERT MUNSTER."

Having finished this explanatory epistle, Bob rang the bell, and called for one of Mr. Crackenthorpe's largest regalias, out of the box marked "Superfine best dos Amigos." "You'd better bring down the box, by the way."

The next day but one brought another billet from Sparkes, in which the old gentleman thus began :—

"MY DEAR MR. MUNSTER,—

"Many thanks for your reply, which, I need hardly add, was most satisfactory;"

and which ended by a renewed proposal to have a day or two at Lushenham, and the kindest regards of Mrs. Sparkes and the young ladies, who quite missed the pleasure of seeing Mr. Munster at the evening parties, &c. &c. &c. Towards the

close of which Bob slipped himself into a hat and coat, and suddenly remembered that he owed a visit to that worthy little man the Rev. Daniel Partington.

When Tom returned to Lushenham there was plenty to do. The first consideration was the steeplechase; so he assembled a committee at once. The nominal stewards consisted of all the masters of hounds round about, that capital sportsman Mr. Bumby at the head of them. Then came a string of M.P.s and Lord-Lieutenants, and of swells of every denomination; and remarkably well they looked on paper. They all entered something, and some intended business: those who did not, regarded the payment of the forfeits in the light of a very remote contingency; and even Tom himself saw one of two things—either that the winner would have to go without a considerable portion of the stakes, or that he would have to pay them. It's astonishing how liberal men are, after a cheerful day's sport, with a patent pencil in their hand, and the conditions of a handicap or a sweep-

stakes before them. The quantities of chances they speculate upon are marvellous: Death, India, Ireland, the Queen's Bench, or Matrimony. However, on paper, the Lushenham chase bid fair to be the best of the season. Top weight 13 st., minimum weight 10 st. 7 lb. A sweepstakes of 10 sovereigns each, half forfeit, and 200 added, half of which came out of the pocket of Tom himself—Munster's 50*l.* might be considered as honorary only. He proposed, indeed, to head the subscription list, as a well-known sporting friend of ours is supposed to have assisted to build churches in the colonies—by heading the donors with a very handsome sum, of which he pays nothing, but expects to receive a trifle for the liberality with which he acts decoy. That project was, however, abandoned, as half-a-loaf was considered better than no bread. To give nothing at all is not unhandsome; but a present of minus 25*l.* was something new to the sporting world of Lushenham.

The working committee made up for the drones by the most active zeal. It consisted

of Tom himself; Munster; a sporting young nobleman, Lord Cropperton, who lived a couple of miles off; Mr. Bumpas, a jovial yeoman of sixteen stone; and a very hard-riding young Sawbones, who had a practical knowledge of the brittleness of other people's members, and a theoretical belief in the infrangibility of his own. They were first-class men for their work. They had always a paper and pencil for the enlistment of stray steeplechasers. They were always on the look-out for something to run for themselves; and the doctor was already happy in the possession of a sort of Muderideroo, which nobody could ride but himself. In fact, his stud was at the present moment something like the learned Serjeant's handwriting: of the three which he called his own, one he could ride, but his groom could not; another his groom could ride, and he could not; and the third, nobody alive, to get through a run, upon any terms whatever. They were also very active at their meetings; they had no end of foolscap paper, and cigars, and Burton beer, and the

'Racing Calendar' and 'Bell;' and they made several propositions and amendments; and, as those met with very little favour, they all set to talking at once. It generally ended by a proposal to finish the day at the Château, which was invariably agreed to, when Tom presided over as good a dinner as it was possible to give them.

The saddle-room was occasionally the scene of these business-like meetings; and as upon the present occasion they could neither increase the number of nominations, nor make 500 sovereigns out of 375, nor do anything in the way of accelerating matters, seeing the races were not to be run till the end of the season, they proposed to go and look at the ground.

"Drinkwater, let's have what hacks you can. Here, one—two—three—oh! you'd rather walk?—four. Let's have the chesnut, and Acheron, and Flowerpot, and, let me see——"

"Not one on 'em!" said Mr. Drinkwater. "Bless you, they're all done up! they've been in fine exercise this three hours, ex-

cept the hack, and he was out all day yesterday, and has to come again to-morrow." And the faithful guardian turned the key of the long stable and put it into his pocket.

"Oh! come, nonsense!" said Tom. "What are we to do? we want to go over the steeplechase ground."

"You'd better walk, sir; it's a good deal safer. As to the doctor there, there's soon to be a wacancy in his district, and he's sure to kill your horse, if he don't do for hisself."

Having oracularly delivered himself of this axiom, Billy put his hands into his pockets, and retired to his own quarters. The discomfited committee set out for their walk. They went up the hill above the village to a fine large grass-field of unmitigated ridge and furrow, which commanded a grand view of the vale below. They were not long in fixing upon a course which included all kinds of fences, of various sizes, but all fitted for the capacity of a hunter. They took, too, a bird's-eye

view of the country; and amongst them managed to make the affair so complicated as completely to puzzle themselves. The line, as they marked it out, reminded one of nothing so much as the Regent's Park canal after an exhibition of the Skating Club; and the figure of 8 which it was presumed to represent was quite as much like the spread eagle as anything else. If the result was not at first sight what it ought to have been, we can excuse that in the manifest unanimity of the committee for one object. Their views of the "manner how" were widely different, but they agreed wonderfully as to the one great necessity— the powers of a hunter and the endurance of his rider.

"That's a big 'un," observed Farmer Bumpas, as they descended towards a stiff post and rails halfway down the hill-side, with a straggling ox-fence and a fairish ditch on the landing-side.

"Nothing, positively nothing," argued Sawbones; "going at the pace they'll go

at it. Sure to get over: no chance of a fall there. What do you say, Squire?"

"Good big fence," replied Tom, to whose name this title had been prefixed by his intimates; "but I think a good hunter would do it."

"I'm *sure* he would," said the sporting doctor.

"Well, we can easily settle the question," said Lord Cropperton. "Perhaps Mr. Sawbones will ride over it before the day?"

"With pleasure, my lord; which horse shall it be?"

"Oh! whichever you like."

"Well, then, I'll have the big brown horse you rode the day before yesterday for second horse. I know he'll go over it or through it."

"Oh! I mean one of your own," said his lordship, mightily tickled with the notion that horses were not more valuable than doctors; "I can't stand horseflesh."

"Oh! come, my lord; if I stand man."

"No, no; it's impossible to have that

brown horse over again if you killed him, and—"

Here Tom stopped the conversation by a remark about the brook. "Not wide enough," said he.

"Certainly not," said the doctor.

"Let's shovel it out to about sixteen feet," said Bumpas; "I'll lend you some hands: they haven't got much to do just now."

"And we'll put up some bushes in front of it to make them rise," added Tom Crackenthorpe, as a clencher.

"That's a sneezer," again said Tom, as they came to a rattling double; the further rail, however, not being so strong as it might have been, would give a chance of getting through, if not over, safely. There was a deep ditch between the rails, running water below, and some very prickly cut blackthorns strewed over it—a sort of open drain.

"Yes, that's a good fence," said the doctor; "not so strong as it might be."

"Bless you, doctor! strong enough for

anything;" and, being on that side of it, Mr. Bumpas sat down on it, when, as if to prove his position, the rail broke in the middle, and let the fat farmer go flop into the blackthorns, whose ill effects were partly counteracted by the running water below.

"By Jove! that's lucky," said Sawbones. "You must send up Peggs to-morrow with a good thick rail and some long nails, or we shall have to change the line; and I'm afraid we shan't be able to get anything bigger round about this country."

"Come," said Cropperton, who really was a pretty good judge, and had his senses about him; "come, it's quite big enough for anything, and looks like a capital course, if one could but see it. Describe it to us, Cracks, that's a good fellow. It's as bad as the maze at Hampton Court."

"Look here. Start from this field, go straight up to that barn, and turn to the right up the big grass-field, with the big ox-fence at the top, into the ridge and furrow. Bear away to the left towards

the windmill. At the windmill turn again to the right, and over the bullfinches, by Jones's farm, down the hill into the bottom, over that little double—"

"Wait a moment," said Cropperton, utterly out of his bearings.

"Oh! don't you see? it's simple enough. You see the bullfinch at the top of the hill, and there are two more which you can't see. Then turn to the right again, and come down-hill to the big double post and rails—old Bumpas's rails, you know; then go straight on to the brook—we'll mark that out before the day—and after crossing the brook go straight up the hill, over the big rails and fence and ditch once more, and then round the top of the hill, across the road, and you have a good run in of about a quarter of a mile."

"But why go over the oxer on the side of that hill twice? Once is enough."

"Because, if they don't fall the first time, they're sure to come to grief the second."

"Well, there's something in that, Tom, at all events. Where's Munster?"

"What! not here? He's spooning old Partington's daughter. She's got some money, I believe; at least so he says: and I suppose he'll go and get married some day or other. He'll be at dinner. Give us a light. Well, I don't think we can do any more, so we may as well go back to luncheon. It's a splendid place for a chase. The next thing is to square the farmers."

When Crackenthorpe got home he found an invitation to dine at the Parsonage that day week; and as he hadn't seen the widow for some few days, he thought he might ascertain beforehand whether she was to be of the party before spoiling his digestion by a clerical feed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LITTLE DINNER.

Tom Crackenthorpe and Munster had come home in time to dress for what the Rev. Daniel Partington called "a little dinner" towards the end of the hunting season. March dust was beginning to fly, the days were lengthening, the hounds were beginning to get a little fine and a little footsore, and, there having been no rain nor frost lately, the studs were growing smaller and stiffer day after day. They were making their toilet by daylight, as the Vicar imagined a stretch to 6.30 was as much as could possibly be required for the formation of an appetite.

"Who's going to dine at the Parsonage, Tom?" said Mr. Munster to his friend; "any one besides ourselves?"

"Gladish, I should think, and his daughter. They're intimate."

"Nobody else? don't happen to know whether the widow's going, do you?"

Fortunately for Tom, it's impossible to see a man's face through an inch and a half of wainscoting, so he answered in the intervals of a close application to his hairbrushes, "How the deuce should I know?"

"Thought you might have asked her out hunting to-day, that's all."

And so he had; and the affirmative reply had put an additional polish into Tom's general appearance, and had stuck a camellia into his buttonhole in particular, to mark the occasion. When Mr. Munster appeared on the landing-place he, too, was not to be despised; and he rather flattered himself, as he expressed it, "though no great beauty under ordinary circumstances, he knew how to put his war-paint on to the best advantage." He had yellow-ochred himself well to-night.

"Tom," said he, looking in at that

gentleman's room *en passant*, and leaning up against the door-sill, "I want your advice."

"It's perfectly at your service; and I hope you will find it as good as it is cheap."

"I've been thinking, Tom, that this is an infernally unprofitable life we are leading here;" and Bob looked like an image of virtue in polished boots.

"That admits of question, old fellow, though I don't want to argue the matter."

"Well, Tom, to tell you the truth, my old governor cuts up very rough sometimes, and I think of settling. He won't do anything for me."

"And you want to do for yourself. Well, Bob, settling always means one of two things—death or matrimony. Who's the young woman? and has she any money?"

"What do you think of old Partington's daughter—the eldest, I mean?"

"To tell you the truth, I never have thought of her at all: that's all a matter of

taste; but I do think you might have done better in the way of a father-in-law."

Just then Tom's own amiable weakness came across his mind, and he thought he should have some difficulty in reconciling the world to Mrs. Bransby: so he stopped short, and added, "but that doesn't sound like money, Bob."

"Oh! you millionaires are so exacting; besides, I mean to work at law again. I shall sell the—"

Just then it occurred to him that the horses he proposed selling belonged to Mr. Curricle, the dealer and job-master.

"But you must have something to start with, Bob, if the governor is inexorable; so I should advise you decidedly not to settle. The moment you're married you'll have all your duns down upon you. They know when to catch you: you'll find 'there's no rest but the grave for the pilgrim of love.'"

"But she's got 15,000*l.*; it's accumulating."

"So I should think by her turn-out on

the grey. Well, I beg your pardon, Bob; I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but I haven't yet realized the situation. How do you know she has money?"

"I heard so before, so I went to Doctors' Commons. All from a godmother. Oh, my eye! what would I give for a couple!"

There's no doubt that with all his sentiment he would have preferred two godmothers to one bride. But the one he could get, and the other he could not.

"What does old Partington say, and the mother, the gorgon?"

"Ah! that's the nuisance: of course, I can't go to him and say, 'My father's an ill-conditioned old beggar, not more than fifty-five, and likely to live as long as I am, so let me marry Matilda, and we'll live on her property.' Still, I must say, they don't seem much averse to business; and if the thing was once over, they'd come round fast enough; besides, she is her own master."

"I'll tell you what, Bob; if we stand here talking about the girl, I'm hanged if we shan't spoil the fish,—so let's be off. It

only wants three minutes to the half-hour."

With that they started.

There's no such latitude ever taken as in dinner-giving. There's your heavy, pompous, ponderous affair. Diamonds, stars and garters, blue ribands and turbans, huge épergnes, flowers, powdered footmen, our own man, iced puddings, and perspiration. The most gorgeous preparations, the grandest company, the very best dinner in the world with everything in season or out of season, and the very least possible means of enjoying it. And there's your wretched, half-starved, miserable counterfeit; pretended wealth, fashion, and society: a hired cook, hired plate, greasy soup, dirty dishes, badly cooked meat and watery vegetables, stupid people injudiciously placed, and not one single thing to be had till it's stone cold. There's your good heavy substantial repast, in which, if you have the stomach of an ostrich and the lungs of a stentor, you may satisfy your hunger, and take part in the conversation:

more than you can possibly eat or drink, brown sherry, sound military port, and loaded claret are the external signs of a hearty welcome, and a deuce of a dyspepsia the next morning. And, lastly, we have to record a wishy-washy table à la Russe, in which one knows nothing of the substance of what one eats, and is so fearfully puzzled by the mongrel language of the carte that you are unable the next morning to tell your physician, with any sort of certainty, whether you partook of fish, flesh, or fowl. I sigh, at a poor man's table, for the return of the honest soup, fish, roast and boiled, which I used to see in my young days, and enjoyed a first-class dinner the more from its rarity. Naturally the spread at the Parsonage had engaged the attention of the ladies for some days, old and young.

"You know, my dear, Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster are accustomed to nice little French dishes, and good things; so we must see what we can do in that way."

"Perhaps, ma,' dear," rejoined Josephine, "they'll like a change."

Now the young lady's theory was certainly the correct one.

"Nonsense, Josephine!" said Miss Partington, "what an absurdity! as if Mr. Munster liked, or expected to see, roast beef and potatoes. We can easily manage the dinner with that book of Francatelli's; and we must have a carte for each person. Let's see, there will be eight of us, if Josephine don't dine."

Now that's just the right number for a good dinner.

"Of course the carte must be in French, dear, and I'm afraid Sarah won't make much hand of that," said Josephine again.

I have always noticed that when people intend to be a little severe in their remarks their mode of address becomes singularly affectionate. In accordance with this principle, Matilda answered, "My darling Joey, I think I can manage that part of it."

"Of course, dear, there's my pocket

dictionary in the parlour; and if there are mistakes, it does not signify much, for I suppose they neither of them understand anything about it."

This was a cruel backhander; and, worse than that, had all the sharpness of a *double*-edged sword, without that oily smoothness which is said to accompany language of this kind. A good deal of the cooking and the time was got over in this way. Mrs. Partington was too good a manager not to have played her part well, and by five minutes before 7 p.m., which was only twenty-five minutes behind time, the company sat down to what they called a nice little dinner.

The combined efforts of the cook and the three ladies had turned out something which was a mixture of the two last classes of entertainment; partaking of their nature, but belonging to neither. Flukes, the village publican, was in attendance as waiter. Cracks, alive to possible deficiencies, brought his own man, and there were two maid-servants, who, when they

were not running up against one another, were listening with intense enjoyment to the *facetiæ* of Mr. Munster. They occasionally retired to enjoy a little laugh, and when they were behind the door, and the guests had to help themselves, it is astonishing how much better they got on.

"Lor! 'Liza, what a funny man he is, to be sure! I thought I should a busted; my, if that fool Flukes hasn't broke missus's best trifle-dish."

There was a little mistake at starting. When the cover was removed from the turbot, it presented the appearance of having died of the cholera. It rather startled the guests, to see a large black thing, as flat as a pancake, where the fish ought to have been. On inspection it proved only to have been placed wrong side upwards. One disadvantage had been avoided; there was no épergne of cut flowers to limit the range of vision or conversation, and it went on pretty generally and cheerfully throughout. It is but justice to say that Mrs. Greystoke looked more bewitching than

ever, and was more than usually attentive to the invalid Captain Gladwish. That gentleman's daughter was, as usual, the picture of good humour, and Matilda had not only dressed her dinner, but her hair, in the height of the mode Française. Crackenthorpe was astonished to find himself admiring Emily Gladwish so much; unluckily, however, the widow saw it too, and took an early opportunity of luring him back before the dessert appeared. The French cartes did not convey that information for which they were intended, and as Mr. Flukes handed the dishes from the sideboard, after carving them, he was applied to more than once for the name of the suspicious-looking object which he was offering.

"What is this?" said Tom, *sotto voce*, looking at some barbarous production in a mottled gravy—"what is this?"

"Reely don't know, sir," replied Flukes, aloud: "Oh! yes, sir, I see—filly de buff Napoleon a la Tartarre!"

"You must try that, Mr. Crackenthorpe, it's 'a la Napolitaine,'" said Miss Matilda.

And Tom helped himself.

"Not such a bad shot of your man," observed Tom, who affected not to recognise Flukes in his new position, "mixing up Napoleon and Tartar sauce together."

"Good run to-day, Munster?" said the host. "You must have been near here; I heard the dogs whilst I was burying a corpse. Cold work!"

"Which, the corpse or the hunting?" asked Munster."

"Becky seen haller chassore," said Mr. Flukes, again, in a louder tone than ever, the effects of a third of a bottle of gooseberry taken surreptitiously between the courses.

"What's that?" asked Captain Gladwish, this time in his innocence.

"They look like snipe," said Tom, to whom they came next, and who helped himself again.

"They *are* snipes," said Flukes in a confidential tone, "but we're ordered to call 'em 'Becky seens' to-day. They come from France, I believe, sir."

"Bumby goes on with the hounds, Munster?" said Captain Gladwish.

"Yes, but he loses his huntsman. It's a bad job, for we shall never have a better in this country; and he's a beautiful horseman. I hope we shall have your patronage to the steeplechases at the end of the season?"

"Certainly," said the Captain; while Mrs. Partington, thinking the conversation had taken too sporting a turn, hoped that Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster were both archers. "Such a charming club, and the ladies' dresses so becoming—white tarlatan with a green scarf, a white straw hat, and a green paroquet's feather."

"And what are these?" once more asked Munster, whether accidentally or to torment Mr. Flukes is not known, as he bent over a dish of most unmistakeable tartlets. "What are these?" Consulting his *carte*, he read, "Tartelettes aux—aux—"

Mrs. Partington had already begun an answer to the question, when Flukes again volunteered an explanation.

"Well, sir, my wife made 'em, and I believe they're about twopence apiece."

"Champagne to Mr. Crackenthorpe," roared and spluttered the Rev. Daniel, by way of covering this misadventure; and Flukes, mindful of himself, immediately selected a virgin victim for immolation. The wire was untwisted, and the string was cut; when, with a loud report, pop went the cork into the face of the rev. gentleman himself, while the champagne itself followed without an interval's delay, right over the table, half of it into Mrs. Greystoke's lap, and the rest into the salad-bowl, which stood ready to receive it.

"Most extrornary — most extrornary! Bless my soul! what's the man about?" spluttered Partington, looking wrathfully up, and wiping his eye with his napkin. "What is the matter, man?"

"Can't think what's come to it; I kark'd 'un down myself, last summer, and it hadn't ought to be so up this cold weather." Whilst stuffing his thumb into the neck of the bottle, he kept running round the room

to offer some of his own brew to the guests. I think he got the remainder of the bottle entirely to himself.

The fact is, that no man on small means ought to give a dinner at all. By all means let the hospitable soul take home some friend, or any number of friends, to enjoy his society; let him give him what he eats himself on a clean table-cloth. Let the dishes and plates be of the hottest; let the meat be of the tenderest; and let the waiting consist of as few hands as possible. A dumb waiter and help yourself, in a clergyman's family—indeed, anywhere but on state occasions—is far the pleasantest mode. Let the room look bright and cheerful, especially in winter, with a warm blazing fire and good lamps. Don't let your wife cover her head and uncover her arms; but let her wreathe her face in smiles and good humour; and your daughters, if you are lucky enough to have any, endeavour to follow her example, "simplices munditiis." On no account attempt champagne and claret, unless you happen to

have them good; and then let them be appropriate to the meats or dishes—not presented higglety-pigglety, as if your friends were only asked to be converted into a sort of family pig-tub. There is nothing so much marks the man of refinement or discernment as this fitness of things. Not writing a dissertation on dinner-giving, I need not say more; but a true philanthropist, knowing how much depends upon a good digestion, and the delicacy of its organism, I could not say less. Beware of sweets in a bad house, and the less you indulge in dessert anywhere the better. A poor man thinks my dictum a hard one. He wants society. Does he?—dinner society? Then let him cultivate his mind and his manners. There are plenty of good Samaritans in this world; but the return they look for is an agreeable, pleasant companion, able to fill up a corner well: not a horrible lion, who monopolises the whole conversation, but a good listener as well as talker, and who knows what to say and when to say it. These persons are not common, but there

are such; and they find no difficulty in enjoying society, without holding out a return of tasteless soup, flabby fish, badly-cooked meats, and cheap wines for the sake of it. Let but a man be worth his salt, and he'll get the meat thrown in.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VISITORS.

Tom Crackenthorpe and Bob Munster survived the dinner; indeed, as their minds were occupied with other things, their stomachs seem to have been less affected than they might have been. (This shows great sympathy between the two.) Munster improved the occasion with Matilda, and Crackenthorpe, who was blest with a portion of that modesty which sits so gracefully on youth, made eyes at the widow. His soft nothings were breathed usually out hunting, where they could be treated as light badinage, or seriously imbibed, as the case might be.

It was clear enough to the neighbourhood that the Château would change its name or its nature before another hunting

season; and much speculation went on over the teaboards among the ladies — at the Sunday-school, and in coming out of church, and on such-like conventional occasions— as to which would remain in the village, Mr. and Mrs. Munster, or Mr. and Mrs. Crackenthorpe.

I think there was great excuse for this gossip. The ladies were both remarkable enough to form subjects of interest. The sermons of the Reverend the Vicar were dull in the extreme; Lushenham was not famous for bonnets; and the singing of the children in church had been discussed so often that the subject was as dry as a speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So the neighbours settled it their own way, and the two gentlemen were as good as done for.

It was determined at the Château to let off an ukase, and order up a few friends to enliven the place for a day or two.

The first who presented himself to their notice was Sparkes. Munster would rather have been excused; he hardly knew whether

he had quite got over the results of his mesmeric experiments.

"Of course he has," said Tom. "Didn't he write you word that he was perfectly satisfied with your explanation?"

"Well, that's right enough; but we have flirted with the girls, Tom, and—"

"*We!* Come, I like that, Munster; you have, not I. Besides, I don't suppose it signifies to old Sparkes; he must be as much used to it as they, living at Pumpington. They'd all have been offended if you had not flirted with them. Besides, you can give him a mount—that'll please the old boy."

"All right. Anybody else? I hope he won't object to something playful, for I can't afford to lend him old Sheepshanks, Curricle's best mount."

"Must ask Cutpurse; you havn't paid that little bill, Bob, yet, for the shooting he so kindly let you."

"It's not due," said Bob, who thought very little about little bills till they were due.

"Then pay him next week—I'll help you."

"'Pon my soul, Tom, that's very liberal of you; but I'd rather not pay him, unless you're particularly anxious."

"Not I; but I've been keeping Acheron nice and fresh for him, and I thought the mount would go for something."

"Very well; then ask Cutpurse. It's a pity we don't know one more infernal rascal to keep him in countenance. Old Sparkes isn't half bad enough."

"Second post, sir," said Mr. Taplow, placing the letters on the table.

"Hallo! Bob, this is lucky—just in time; though whether he's quite up to the mark or not I can't tell. I should hardly say he was far behind."

"What is it—a proposed visitor? I hope he brings his own steed."

"Not he. It's our old friend Stuart, of Heidelberg and Wiesbaden notoriety. I'll mount him on Nosegay. He won't do any harm to the horses, if he don't swindle somebody at hazard or écarté."

"Charming," said Bob, who chuckled at the proposed meeting of Mr. Sparkes and the Professor, of whose identity Tom Crackenthorpe was still in delightful ignorance.

The consequence of these auspicious arrangements was, that in the course of the following week Messrs. Cutpurse and Sparkes appeared at the Château. Sparkes had put up all his best hunting paraphernalia; his whitest cords, most correct tops, and a checked neckcloth, which was starched to the consistency of a middle-age instrument of torture, but in which long practice had enabled Sparkes to swallow a sandwich or to take off his hat to a lady without winking. Indeed, he was one of the straight-necked ones, and no mistake, when really got up after this fashion. They added a knife and fork at their hospitable board for the Rev. Daniel Partington, and persuaded a sporting young squire and the hard-riding doctor to join them. The dinner was excellent, and the wines were appreciated, by the quantity they swallowed, and the good-humour that reigned through-

out. Captain Stuart was announced late in the evening, had up the soup and fish, and a sweetbread, a fresh bottle of champagne, and was just in time to commence his first bottle of claret when they had got to their fourth. Sparkes saw several Captain Stuarts, but was beyond distinguishing any one of them; and when they had had coffee and one of Tom's best regalias, the old gentleman was just enabled to count sixteen people, though he was quite sober enough to recollect that they had sat down only eight. The parson, to do him justice, supported the credit of the cloth by retiring in good time, and leaving the rest of the party to settle their morning's prospects to their own satisfaction.

Cutpurse and Son, of Pluckham-court, Holborn, were money-lending solicitors of the Jewish persuasion. There is a vulgar prejudice against that highly intelligent race. We confess to sharing it. Cutpurse was quite unmistakably a Caucasian. There was the fine development of feature, so remarkably indicative of the race; and had

he lived in the days of Richard the First, his teeth would have been drawn for the very pleasure of extraction. They looked like biting, every one of them. Beyond the speculative shooting we have before mentioned, he could scarcely be called a sportsman; and the first impression produced by his appearance was that he was lost without an alias and two hats. He felt exceedingly flattered by the invitation to Lushenham, and he was not at all cured of his infatuation until he had dropped nine pounds fifteen shillings at blind hookey to the superior luck of Captain Stuart. This evening he was joyous in jewellery, velvet, patent leather, and black beard, and retired to bed under the impression that such was the ordinary life of the aristocracy of England.

"Good night, Mr. Cutpurse. There's a nice quiet animal for you to-morrow. Breakfast at nine. We ride our hunters on; it's only five miles."

"Good country?" said Sparkes.

"Best in England—stiffish—all posts and rails, excepting the river."

"River!" said the Jew. "Is there a toll on the bridge?"

"There's no bridge—we jump it."

Cutpurse stared uneasily.

"What's my horse to-morrow, my dear Crackenthorpe?" said Sparkes; "you know I'm not so young as I was."

"Pretty good, though, still. Munster, what have you got for Mr. Sparkes?"

"Nice, quiet little horse; kicks a little at starting, but charming to sit upon when he gets warm."

Sparkes thought of this, and then dreamt of it.

"What's your weight, Mr. Cutpurse?" said Munster, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Well, I don't know; I weigh different at different times."

"How many shekels?—pounds, I mean," said Bobby.

"Ah, ah! Good, good! No pounds, my good friend, Mr. Munster; you have the pounds."

"The scales, Tom; Mr. Cutpurse, in the scales."

And they adjourned to the scales.

"Bless my soul, what a lot of money he must have in his pocket! We can't weigh you without you take it all out. Ah! that makes a difference. There—is that all? Well, I think Acheron will carry him. He's the best horse in the country, only you musn't hold him at his fences; just let him go where he likes, and Sunday itself wouldn't stop him—you'd be out of one week into another without knowing it. Put him down, Tom, 9st. 5lbs., without his money; he's nearly 10lbs. lighter than when he came here."

"And Stuart has gained a pound or two. I'm going to bed, unless Mr. Cutpurse would like another cigar. Good night."

And Tom Crackenthorpe retired.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

A LITTLE headache is the natural consequence of a good deal of claret, sherry, and champagne, however excellent they may be of their kind; and if they are assisted by a gigantic regalia, and a few unsuccessful rounds of blind hookey, it's astonishing how unmistakable it becomes. All things considered, Old Sparkes turned up at breakfast time wonderfully well. He carried his head very steadily between the starched folds of his neckcloth, and didn't seem to care much about anything but his tea. He made, however, a feint of attack upon an admirable ham; and certainly, if a man can eat anything under the melancholy circumstances of the case, it is ham. Yorkshire lean with Westphalia fat, I am told, is

the correct thing. As he proceeded he got better, and by the time he had admitted that that "one glass of cognac" after the *pâté* was too much for him, he might be said to be convalescent.

"Now, Stuart, what will you have—tea or coffee?"

"Neither, thank you; never touch either until after dinner," replied the sinister-looking Captain, who was just as cool and comfortable as if he hadn't been sitting up and playing; indeed, the fact of winning instead of losing may make a difference to some men. Probably the little Jew lawyer, who hadn't spoken a word since he came into the room, was feeling the effect of his loss of weight. He looked unutterably wretched, and, as if to torture him more horribly, Mr. Taplow presented hot plate after hot plate, and muffins and eggs as accidental makeweights, until the poor little Cutpurse was fain to ask when the tea would be ready.

"Tea? What, haven't you had any? Taplow, some fresh-made tea to Mr. Cut-

purse. I'm afraid these fellows have emptied the pot here; but it won't take ten minutes, and there's lots of time." (Here Cracks, whose head was as strong as Guy Earl of Warwick's helmet, set to work on a kidney.) "But you're going to dress after breakfast, I suppose?"

"To tell you the truth," began Mr. Cutpurse, "I really didn't ——"

"Never mind—gad! we'll manage: we'll find something for him: breeches—I believe you. I fancy Munster must have bought up a slop-shop: I never saw such a collection in my life."

"Now," said Bob, in a cheery tone of voice: "come along, Cutpurse—I'll rig you out. What colour?" And the *toilette* began.

"There, now, there's a pair of breeches! I bought those in Bow Street nine years ago, to act Tony Lumpkin in, at my dame's. They're what Nathan called a first-class article; but there's no believing a Jew, you know. What! too small? Nonsense, you've got 'em on hind-side before! No,

by Jove, you're right! I thought old clothes would have fitted you to a turn. I say, Cracks——"

Cracks, being the host, however, didn't respond; so Stuart went up to assist with his advice.

"I say, Stuart, have you anything that would fit Mr. Cutpurse down here?"

During this time Mr. Cutpurse was secretly praying that nothing might fit him, and determining, if luck befriended him, to retire again to bed as soon as the sportsmen were gone on their expedition.

"I can lend him a pair of spurs," said the Captain, being about the last thing that the Jew lawyer was likely to want. "But leathers," added he, "by Jove, that's a difficulty! No, it's not—I see. Look here, Munster, Mr. Cutpurse has some drawers: splendid fit, and nothing to do but to sew the buttons on in the right place. Come here—you can hardly tell them from leathers now at this distance."

And whilst Cutpurse was shivering with cold, having not yet substituted anything

for his Tony Lumpkin suit, Munster and his friend the Captain took stock of him at a distance, and made these remarks, much as though he were a dummy, or a prize ox at an Islington cattle-show :—

"He must have four buttons on there, just below the knee; and I suppose he'll want four more for his braces; then a pair of sham tops to his own Wellingtons (lucky he wears Wellingtons). Green—are they? What, the Wellingtons? We'll black them all over: 'pon my soul, it's a first-rate idea."

"But it will be so dreadfully cold!" Mr. Cutpurse ventured to suggest, in the tone of a man not wishing to push his opinion, but offering rather a suggestion to be taken into consideration.

"Billy, Billy Drinkwater!" shouted Mr. Munster out of the window, which he threw open, admitting a refresher from the N.E. upon the half-dressed Jew. "Cold? oh! no, certainly not, in exercise."

And here Billy entered the room, and they continued in a livelier strain to discuss

the matter, as if they now formed a quorum. Cutpurse still sat at the corner of his bed, and the grate, empty of all but last night's ashes, did not add to the present warmth of the room.

"No, no! the gentleman won't be cold; 'cos the oss 'll keep 'un warm—leastways he do me; and in course my missus can sew on the buttons; but there ain't over much time, and, as we're a trifle busy, I'll lend the gentleman a pair of mine—the wery best in England—fit him to a turn; we're jist of a size and not very unlike:" and Billy looked at his broad ugly mug in the looking-glass, and leered like a satyr.

"Come with me, Mr. Munster; I'll give you the smallclothes. They're the thickest, and the hardest, and the roughest in all England, something between a deal board and a Witney blanket, and if he rides Acheron for a few hours in them, I'm blest if I think he'll ever sit down again in his life. I think he's the gent as let you and master the shooting."

Under these auspices the toilet was not

long in completing. When Mr. Cutpurse appeared under the combined efforts of Billy Drinkwater, Captain Stuart, and Robert Munster, he was a very extraordinary mixture, and might have been mistaken for a loosened Bedlamite, with a monomania for hunting. On his head he wore a white billycock, with a small grouse-feather on one side, which had remained since the twelfth of last August, the trophy of Crackenthorpe's first shot. His waistcoat was his own, and decorated with his usual amount of mosaic work, without which no Israelite considers himself quite a gentleman. His coat, long in the arms and back, and honoured by a hundred stains and patches, must have been on the same service as Tony Lumpkin's breeches. The small-clothes were such as your true stableman delights in—large and baggy to a degree, until they descend to the small of the knee, to make that part still smaller. His boots, ignorant of tops, were blacked to meet the breeches and his necessities: no man could have mistaken them for anything but what

they were. His appearance in front of the Château was a signal for public approbation, to which he was enabled to respond only by a miserable and a sickly smile. They had got him up only to get him down.

The horses were already at the door.

"Don't you think the gent had better get up in the field at the back of the yard?" asked Drinkwater, sidling up to his master.

"Who do you mean by the gent?" said Mr. Crackenthorpe.

"Why, the little gent in them curious breeches and boots," said Billy.

"No, I don't; why shouldn't he get up here?"

"Cos it's so precious hard on these stones."

There was just one drop of the milk of human kindness left in Billy.

"Yes; very well; but we must all go there. It won't do to send him there alone."

So the party drew off to the stables for a minute, lit their cigars, and inspected the rest of the stud; having done so, the horses

were supposed to be in a place perfectly safe to mount, whatever might happen.

Horses are very often fresh at starting, as gentlemen know. Acheron was remarkable for his playful disposition; yet he had his mild days. Not so the horse on which Mr. Sparkes had just placed his left hand, preparatory to putting himself into the saddle. He had one trick: he would put his head down, if you allowed him to do so, and give two sharp and decisive kicks; if these were unsuccessful, he gave up for the day.

Sparkes, of course, prided himself on his horsemanship and his knowledge of hunting and everything connected with it. Cutpurse was a snob, and a Londoner; and how any man in that costume could pretend to ride anything Sparkes did not know. How should he? He therefore took his seat on Mr. Curricle's other horse, with a charming and rather dignified *sang froid*. He was scarcely in the saddle, however, nobody looking at him to admire the freshness of his complexion and the coldness of

his demeanour, when down went his horse's head and up went his heels, with a quickness and an elevation which produced immediate results. So quickly was Sparkes on the flat of his back, that nobody saw it done. Everybody saw him there; but when Crackenthorpe arrived to the rescue, he asked the only question which could have been asked,

"How the deuce did that happen?"

"Happen? egad, sir, I don't know what you call 'happen;' but if it 'happens' often, I should say it was something more than a matter of chance."

However, as they all offered to change horses, and nothing further of this playful nature appeared, Sparkes was mollified.

The malicious pleasure with which Munster watched Cutpurse on Acheron was impressive, but this was one of Acheron's quiet days, and notwithstanding the temptation held out to the horse by that gentleman's peculiarity of seat, he walked out of the field-gate, at the back of the stable-yard, like a lamb.

"Why, Billy, what's up with Acheron? he hasn't put his back up," said Munster, hanging back.

"Well, no, he hasn't; p'raps he don't know what to make of the gent, or p'raps he's seen the big breeches. He ain't noways so playful with me as he used to be; but he's worse after a bit, sometimes. When he do find it out he'll make up for lost time, I shouldn't wonder."

And with that Billy shut the gate and touched his hat; for though a very rough customer, he was scrupulously civil when not affronted.

As they jogged on to cover, Sparkes finding himself not hurt, and having taken advantage of a stable-brush to put himself to rights, and Acheron showing no symptoms of changing his present course, things assumed a cheerful appearance. The balmy air had a becoming effect upon Mr. Cutpurse. He looked less green every minute, unless that was to be attributed to the contrast with the surrounding country. He certainly gained confidence fast. He

ventured, indeed, to touch Acheron very gingerly over the neck with a hunting-crop he had borrowed; but as it produced nothing more than a lurch with one hind-leg, and a suspicious falling back of the ears, he determined upon trying it on no more.

Crackenthorpe was the only one with any weight upon his mind. "Sorry old Sparkes was kicked off," said he to himself, "though he has cheated me most confoundedly. It's not the right thing to ask a man to your house, and then have him on his back at your own door; might have hurt him too, poor old buffer. However, he's pretty happy again now, and the horse will carry him. As to Cutpurse, hanged if I know what's going to happen to him. Got no wife, I suppose; don't look a likely chap for any woman to have fallen in love with; but then they do marry sometimes without falling in love."

At that moment he caught sight of the widow Greystoke, and his ruminations took too grave a turn for transcription. The

rest of the party seemed to be enjoying themselves exceedingly.

By the time they reached the meet, the hounds were already gone on. And I always find, the nearer a man is to the meet, the more certain he is to be behind time.

Mr. Cutpurse's appearance excited much attention, but it was of a kind more demonstrative than flattering; in fact, Tom cursed his ill-luck in not remembering that a man is known by his friends. He was certainly not proud of his acquaintance.

As the hounds were thrown into cover, he saw Mr. Drinkwater, who had taken advantage of a hack in the stable, to walk up to the cover side.

"What will become of Mr. Cutpurse, Drinkwater? the horse seems quiet enough."

"Aye! he won't kick to-day; he'll only run with the beggar."

"Then keep him in sight if you can; I don't want him to be killed."

"Nor the 'oss either, I should think. He's a deal the most value of the two."

Tom then paid his compliments to Mrs. Greystoke; the rest of his party were happily more intent upon their own affairs than on his, and did not trouble him with their company. Munster started at once in pursuit of a grey cob and a habit he saw lower down the cover. Sparkes had found a pal in the hard-riding Doctor; Stuart was only desirous of a good start, and stuck close to the huntsman; and Cutpurse soothed Acheron, and followed at an humble distance the bold majority. At that moment a fox was halloed away.

This is a moment in a man's life, when, if ever number one may be treated as the trump card in the pack, there is an excuse for some selfishness. What with opening the wicket-gate at the cover, which only lets one man through at a time, and then requires considerable energy on the part of the successor to keep it from closing again; what with the three only practicable places out of cover to accommodate a hundred or

two ardent spirits, and one of those blocked up by a thrusting schoolboy and his pony come to grief; what with your own want of decision, and the remarkable possession of that quality of those behind who are shouting along the line, "Now, then, sir! pray get on; who is that in the front blocking up the way?"—what with these and a few other common miseries of getting, or rather of not getting away close to hounds, it is nothing extraordinary that Crackenthorpe took care of himself and Mrs. Greystoke; Bob Munster of Miss Partington, whose cousin, the Bashi-Bazouk, was off on his own hook; Captain Stuart and old Sparkes severally of themselves; and that Mr. Cutpurse on Acheron was left to look out for the practicable places, and on no account to meddle with his horse's head. Whether he did so or not is the question; he says he did not, the results tend to prove the reverse.

Checks, thank goodness, are known in every country, notwithstanding the alarming intelligence communicated weekly to

the *Field* and *Bell's Life* of a ceaseless pursuit of one fox for an hour and forty minutes over some country or other; and consequently, on this auspicious day, Bumby had a check within ten minutes or a quarter-of-an-hour of finding his fox.

Most of his field had ridden with something less of severity than Bumby himself, and in tolerable security; gates had done their duty, and none but the truly blood-thirsty had come to grief in that fifteen minutes. The women and the ponies were all there. At the moment that Scrummager was hitting off the scent with the sagacity for which that five-year old hunter is remarkable, disdainful of the distant hallo, or of the more personal attempt to carry him off the line, a small hazel copse on the right of the field, and by no means in the traversed line of the hunted fox, opened with a frightful crash. Bump, thump, 'went a head or a boot; c-r-a-s-h, with a long crackling noise, went the trees on either side; and, with his mouth bleeding, and his head and tail well out, Acheron

appeared. That he had got rather the better of his rider was evident from that gentleman's appearance. He had been pulled out of his saddle, and was sitting behind it, holding on by the reins and the pommel. He had one whole boot, and about two-thirds of the other. His cap was fortunately well down upon his head. His coat had lost one skirt; and there was a general appearance of loose jewellery about his neck and breast, which belonged rather to a man with difficulty escaping from the hands of a garotter. The case was simple enough.

The first fence had shaken Cutpurse out of his seat on alighting, and as he got back into the saddle after some lengthened operation near the horns, he managed to put his spurs into the horse's shoulders. He was quick at taking a hint, and without any regard to the hounds or the field he made off at a good round pace: most people would have called it running away. He made for a hazel copse, undefended luckily by its usual ditch and fence, and rushed

unresistedly through it. As he emerged, the sight of the field was to Cutpurse as the advent of the good Samaritan; and he having ceased from sheer inability to pull, Acheron had ceased to resist, and galloped straight into the middle of the people, who made way on every side. Mr. Cutpurse, having crawled back into the saddle, was about to answer the inquiries of his friends, and the derision of the spectators, by abandoning the pleasures of the chase, and endeavouring to secure only a quiet return to Lushenham, when that noisy brute Scrummager gave notice of his success; the halloo on the hills was repeated, the horn sounded, the horses began to trot, from that trot they broke to a gallop, and before our friend Crackenthorpe could offer his condolences, and just as he was on the point of suggesting an exchange of horses, Acheron once more started with his damaged freight.

"He's off again, by Jove! What a pluck'd one it is, to be sure!"

Cracks looked up, Munster looked up;

and to the dismay of the first and the delight of the second, they saw him disappearing over the next hill towards a very practicable bullfinch in the opposite direction to the hounds.

I hope he won't be killed," said Cracks.

"I hope not either," said Stuart; "he hasn't paid me that nine pounds fifteen yet, and I don't suppose I shall find it in his will."

Meanwhile the hounds set-to running, as they will run sometimes over a fine scenting country; men set-to riding, as they very seldom will ride in any country but Mr. Bumby's; and by the time they had broken up their fox, every man, excepting those concerned for the horse, the clothes, or the money of the Jew lawyer, had forgotten his existence.

No sooner did Billy Drinkwater see him begin to go than he began to consider whether his master's property might not be his particular business. Having made up his mind that it was, with a melancholy sigh he turned from the sport, and cantered

up the hill towards the thick bullfinch, which he honestly hoped might bring the two to grief. He found nothing in it but a piece of his own breeches, which had been left there. It was a considerable way round by the gate, and Mr. Drinkwater therefore essayed the fence at a broken place. The best of us fall sometimes; and by the time Mr. D. had turned a summersault or two, and ascertained that the hack was all right as well as himself, he might as well have looked for a needle in a bottle of hay as Acheron or his rider.

That gentleman's course was erratic; but, with some sort of reason in his madness, he kept the hounds somewhere to his left hand for a length of time. Occasionally Cutpurse, unable to stop him, would still turn him, and in this form or fashion he made the circuit of several large fields, eventually making his exit through, rather than over the fence, and continuing the same amusement in the next pasture. It is but justice to his rider to state that he never fell off—he was here, there, and

everywhere; but with a bold defiance of fate, he was still in the saddle. Perfectly exhausted, it is true, but with his arms wrapped convulsively round Acheron's neck, he had the satisfaction of negotiating several very ugly fences, to say nothing of being carried bodily through a piece of timber, which opened involuntarily to receive them. In a given time the horse was quite as much beat as the rider; and coming down to the bottom of a grass-field, he finished his career by going straight at the Washingborough brook. Of course, Cutpurse let go his hold at the sight of the water, and tumbled ignominiously into the mud, from which he was retrieved by a couple of grinning yokels, at work with a team in the next field; whilst Acheron lay without sense or motion, luckily high and dry, on the bank, from which recumbent position he made no attempt to rise.

"My heye, Bill, I do think he be a dead 'un!" This referred to Acheron.

"No, he bean't dead; more's the pity!"

So thought Cutpurse, but he didn't say so—he felt perfectly sure, however, that he was out of any more riding.

"He's a broken-back'd 'un, I lay a trifle."

"Broken back? What had I better do?" said Cutpurse, imploringly.

"Can't do nothin' but shoot 'un: put 'un out of his misery, poor thing! Such a fine 'oss, too; and such a jumper! I suppose you be throw'd out; the 'ounds is gone the other side o' the hill, this ten minutes or more."

By this time one or two more came from the farm, and a couple of women joined in the chorus—"Poor thing! well, to be sure! lor, Giles, what is to be done?"

"Ha' you got a gun? 'cos he can't lie here groanin' till master comes home."

"To be sure; but who's to shoot 'un?"

"Oh! I dessay the gent 'ud like to shoot 'un hisself."

This bloody-minded sentiment was nearer the truth than Bumpkin imagined. Giles just then appeared at the gate, having

acted upon the suggestion and gone for his master's gun. Acheron continued to groan.

It was a fortunate circumstance for Tom Crackenthorpe that Mr. Cutpurse was no great hand at the knacker's art. First, he had to make up his mind; then to find the place to bore a hole; then he presented at half-cock; and then, when he did pull in real earnest, the gun missed fire. At that moment there came through the field-gate the second whip with a couple of puppies, one of which had been kicked, and which he was leading. Of course he came to see what was going on; whilst Mr. Cutpurse proceeded to open the nipple with a pin, urged to the work of destruction by the lamentations of the women—"Poor thing, poor thing! put 'un out of his misery!"

"Hollo! now, then, what are ye at wi' the horse?—ain't a goin' to shoot him? What's he done?—only given ye a black eye?"

And here Jack handed over the puppies and his horse to Giles, and began to examine the dying quadruped.

"He's broke his back," said Mr. Cutpurse

dolefully, thinking what might be the expense of such a brute, and how much he could save by the carcase.

"Broke his back? why, blow'd if it ain't that runaway devil o' Mr. Crackenthorpe's! Good horse, though. Broke his back, has he? and you was a goin' to shoot him? Why, he's only pumped. Come up 'oss!—come up!" And giving him a sharpish flick with the point of his whip, Acheron gave a final grunt, and got on to his legs with a prolonged shake. "It's rayther lucky for you, young man, as that 'ere gun don't go off very kindly, or you'd a committed manslaughter, I should say. I don't know who you be, but darn'd if you ain't a rum 'un, you know, and no mistake! Here, give us hold o' those couples, young fellar. Broke his back? I'm blowed if he won't break your neck, now, afore you get home, if you come any of them games any more. He's all alive again." And at that eventful moment Mr. Drinkwater appeared on the other side of the brook, coming down to the scene of the catastrophe.

Acheron was ordered up to the farmyard, where he was dressed over a bit, and just a ltttle warm gruel and a pint of ale administered. Billy Drinkwater crossed by a ford in the neighbourhood, and appeared for the consolation of Mr. Cutpurse.

"Woay, wo-ay, little man; Lor'! he's as fresh as ever—he'll run agen directly. Now, sir, you'd better get up, and be off; just give him a gentle jog to keep him from chilling." And Billy held the stirrup ready for the Jew to get up again. "Nose bleeds, does it? I know a key's a werry good thing, so is cobwebs; but whether you put 'em down your back, or up your nose, I can't say; key up your nose, I suppose, and turn it; cobwebs down your back, in course, catches the fleas."

During this suggestive advice, the terrible prophecy of Jack, the second whip, came to mind—"Break your neck, now, afore you get home, if you come any of them games any more." As to getting on Acheron again, it appeared an act of deliberate suicide without extenuating circumstances.

"I'll lead him a bit," said Cutpurse, which seemed like a compromise between walking and riding.

"That's no use, sir; the horse 'll catch cold. There, give him to me, and I'll jog him home by the side of mine. I dessay Joskins will lend you something to ride to Lushenham when he comes back—won't he, missus?"

Saying which, with much coolness, Mr. Drinkwater just threw the reins over the horse's neck, and, jumping on to his own pony, trotted deliberately off, leaving his master's friend staring after him.

"Not a going to trust him with any more of our valuable animals, not if I knows it. He'll be blowing their brains out if they begin dancing a bit, and most on 'em do betimes."

The party at the Château was about dressing for dinner, when who should appear but the Jew lawyer! He had neither bag nor baggage, and no horse; but he had a very handsome cotton umbrella, evidently the property of Mr. Joskins. He

would willingly have gone quietly up to his room, with the modesty for which almost everybody in a similar position is remarkable. He was, however, hailed, as he entered, with vociferous acclamation.

"Where's Joskins' hack? Had another downer? By Jove, how you must have ridden! How did you get home—rail or post?—you don't mean to say you walked? Why, Drinkwater told you to borrow old Joskins' pony. What have you done with your boot? How far is it from here? Why, you must have walked nine miles at least. I wish I could walk like that, don't you, Cracks?—we could take that shooting then again this year."

At last the unhappy money-lender was allowed to dress himself; and when he got down it was difficult to say whether he was not a more miserable object than before, so tired and woe-begone was his appearance.

Dinner, however, restored him. He had just begun to feel himself. Champagne and the crackling fire had done wonders; and the necessity for eating had spared him quite

such a torrent of questions as he must have submitted to. He had failed in his attack upon the farmer's generosity, who regarded him as an impostor; and the two females and Giles and Bumpkin had sucked him dry of his small change. He had a black eye, a pain in the small of the back, and a blister on his heel; but the dinner was so good, he had just forgotten his misery.

"Please, sir, could Mr. Drinkwater speak to you for a minute?"

"Tell him to come to the door. What is it, Drinkwater?"

"The horse is uncommon bad, sir."

"Which?"

"Acheron—the one as Mr.—that gent with the—the—black heye rode; he'll be a stiff 'un before to-morrow. I've sent for Doseham."

And Billy retired.

"That's a bad business; can't be helped. Have some champagne, Cutpurse? dry or——"

"Moist, thank you," said Cutpurse, so utterly dumbfounded by this pleasant intel-

ligence that he swallowed bumper after bumper of all sorts of wines, and was eventually taken to his room fast asleep with drink and fatigue between Mr. Taplow and a footman.

"Half-past eleven," said Mr. Taplow, the next morning, drawing up a blind, and admitting a blinding sunshine.

"Bless me! you don't say so? and where are the gentlemen?"

"All gone hunting, except Mr. Sparkes; he's gone to Pumpington."

"And the horse—the one that was ill last night?"

"Oh! he's been dead some hours, sir."

As if it was a weekly occurrence!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PLEASURES OF MEMORY.

Before Cutpurse proceeded to dress himself he took a judicial view of his position—in the language of his professional brethren he began to "sum up." The total was not a pleasant figure to look at. According to a fair estimate of his performance he had not reaped much by his visit to his client Mr. Munster. There was the expense of the journey both ways, ready money—there was a matter of nine pounds and more for blind hookey to Captain Stuart, that was not paid yet, and Cutpurse and Co. were accustomed to count interest per day, so that fact was a little gain. There were the usual fees to grooms, servants, &c., which he determined should be unusually small. There was a pair of boots—good ones, too,

originally—of patent leather, green tops, utterly ruined, and one almost entirely missing; breeches—oh, no! the rest of the clothes belonged to other people. Then, on the debit side might be placed a frightful headache, squeamishness, and utter prostration; loss of two days' time, and no business done with his clients. Clearly no present want of money with Mr. Munster or his good friends. Was that all? Well, not quite; there was that little item of the horse. And here the Jew lawyer crawled out of bed. "All gone out hunting! Father Abraham! that's lucky: I must have business, too. I can't stand another night of it; and even that's better than the day." Here he made a desperate attempt to stand upright. I only hope none of my readers have felt that indescribable all-overishness resulting from too much drink, a solitary ride on a hot-horse, accompanied by three or four falls, and a natural liability to lumbago. The pain almost overcame his resolution; and had he not caught sight of Billy Drinkwater in the stable-yard at that

moment, he must have crept back into the sheets again. The sight of the redoubtable Billy nerved him to the task, and he proceeded to dress himself. Having recovered himself a little from the first shock, he began to think over the value of the dead horse. "Say thirty pounds," cogitated Mr. Cutpurse, "or even forty; he can't be worth more than that; then there's the carcass—say two pounds—to the good. Then there's Munster's bill due next month, and the shooting he took as part payment. Well, I must take off that; I'd better have stopped at home. Perhaps their friend the Captain may want a loan some day"—and by the time he got thus far he finished his toilet, and crept stealthily and painfully downstairs.

"Tea, sir — coffee, sir?" said Crackenthorpe's own man, repairing the *débris* of the breakfast-table. "Rolls, sir — little boar's head? yes, sir; not so much fat, sir?"

"No, no!—not boar's head," said the Jew, who expected the roof to fall in upon

him already for his wickedness. "No—no boar's head!" thinking of his own.

"Ham—fried ham in ten minutes," was Mr. Taplow's next offer.

"No—nothing to eat; just a cup of tea; and—and—I say, Taplow, could you get my carpet-bag packed up directly, and tell me when the next train goes to town."

"Town? yes, sir, certainly," replied Taplow, with an expression of some surprise. "There's a train at one o'clock, sir; perhaps I'd better do your things at once;" and, leaving him abruptly to finish his breakfast, the ready valet and butler proceeded to pack the Jew lawyer's carpet-bag. He packed it to some purpose; and when the unlucky owner got to town, he found his own dress suit left behind, and the torn coat, hat, boots, and breeches of Mr. Drinkwater and his master's in the mouth of his sack.

The death of Acheron was an awful consideration, and no amount of the very best "gunpowder" could drown the reflections which naturally arose. Being somewhat

ignorant of business of this kind, and of the expectations formed by gentlemen on the subject of horse-flesh, Mr. Cutpurse was down upon his luck. It was a painful fact that he was not likely to get free of his present difficulty under fifty pounds, supposing he forgot to pay Captain Stuart; and that ate up a moderate share of his interest upon Munster's loan. However, having satisfied his appetite, he began to speculate on his best method of getting to the station. The best method had reference to the mode of progression least noticeable; inasmuch as a solemn principle of money-saving, where there was none to be made, taught him that his first duty was bilking the servants, as far as practicable. If he could only collar his carpet-bag, and be off, it was hard if he didn't meet with a chance lift for a shilling or two on the road; or perhaps the village fly might be got out, and the ostler despatched for his bag at the cost of sixpence. He started to cross the stable-yard in furtherance of his design.

Unfortunately for him, at that moment Mr. William Drinkwater was enjoying his morning pipe in a strong gleam of sunshine, with his back to the stable pump, and wondering what was to be done with Acheron at the end of the season. "We can't have such a brute as that in the stable any longer; he couldn't even win the Pumpington Handicap, for the boy isn't born that could steer him under 12 or 13 stone at least; and that being far above Mr. Jolly's cut, I wonder who'll have the luck to get him. I'm blest if here ain't his murderer—it wasn't a bad idea of Mr. Munster; it's frightened the little man above a bit, I know." Indeed Mr. Cutpurse had not the most cheerful-looking countenance in the world; and his very gingerly way of walking gave him the appearance of a cat going to steal Devonshire cream in the absence of the dairymaid. The sight of Mr. Drinkwater was unexpected, and did not seem to afford him any remarkable gratification. To avoid him, however, was impossible.

"Mornin' sir; none the worse for the ride yesterday, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no! not at all: all the better, thank you. Terrible business about the poor horse. What could it have been from?"

"Terrible! I suppose you never was on such a horse before?"

"Never!" and Mr. Cutpurse was about to add something about his determination never to go on such another again, if he knew it, when he was cut short by Mr. William Drinkwater—

"No; I daresay not. The best horse in these parts, and such a stayer! but you was too hard upon him, indeed you was, sir; and you went miles out of your line, and yet there he was, as one might say, overhauling the hounds at every step. 'Pon my word, it is a terrible business. We daren't tell master: dash my wig, if I know what 'ud happen!"

"Moses! what a piece of ill-luck, to be sure! and I must go by the train."

"Going by the train? I don't know

how we shall ever tell master: the most valuable horse we had in the stable; and he's been a keeping him for you!—I heard him say so—and now he's dead! Such is life." And here Billy looked profoundly solemn.

Cutpurse contemplated the carriage-house weathercock, a fox in full sail up-wind, and was silent. At length he resumed—"Well, now, what do you suppose such a horse as —as—as—that one is worth?" He forbore to mention the name, because he had forgotten it, or from delicacy to Mr. Drinkwater's feelings.

"What's he worth? Why, thirty shillings, I should say."

"I mean if he was alive, you know;" and the Jew blushed at his own temerity.

"Oh, ah! You mean what was his price afore you kill'd him, sir. Ah! now I see. I always said, says I, that little gent's a going to behave like a gentleman. Ah! it's a deal of money for a stiff 'un, too." As Cutpurse didn't quite understand the drift of this, he waited patiently while Mr. Drinkwater summed up in his own mind

the real marketable value of the horse when alive. "The actual value of an animal of that stamp to a hunting man, a man really fond of riding a good horse to hounds, is about three hundred. He was worth more to us, because we're short of horses, and he was a sound good horse, cut and come again, you know, sir; besides, between ourselves, he'd have won the Pumpington steeplechase, and our own most likely. Lor'! he'd a been worth a thousand pounds in a couple of months." And when Mr. Drinkwater looked up to see the effect his words had produced, he was perfectly astounded at the result of his own oratory. So horribly aghast did the little lawyer seem, that in very pity he hastened at once to relieve his mind to a certain extent of the vague impression of the mischief he had done to his host, which he did after the following fashion: "However, it's no use vexing you about that; you couldn't tell anything about it; and I always says, if gentlemen will lend valuable steeplechase horses, they oughtn't to expect more than a

fair return for them, if any little accident does happen."

"A return, oh! yes, to be sure. I see," said Cutpurse, seeing nothing but Crackenthorpe's horror at the fatal termination of the affair.

"I suppose, sir, you never had such a thing happen to you afore?"

"Oh, dear, no! And I haven't the least idea what to do. I'm sure I'm as sorry as if it had been one of my own. What can I do?" The inquiry was not made with a view to an answer; it was rather an hysterical exclamation; but it got one immediately.

"Well! you know, sir, custom regulates all such things. If such a thing happened to me, why, as a poor man, putting the horse's value at a fair price, I shouldn't expect to pay above half, not if I kill'd him by fair riding. But you see gentlemen's different, and I dare say you wouldn't like to offer less than two hundred."

"Offer less than two hundred!" repeated Cutpurse, mechanically.

"Well, say a hundred-and-fifty, perhaps: not offer it to Mr. Crackenthorpe as a present, you know—blow'd if I should like to be the man to do that. He's uncommon quiet till he's put out; but this here death in the family will stir him up a bit. No, no, sir; you just take my advice."

"Well! tell me what I ought to do—of course I must do something handsome."

Billy pursed up his mouth, rolled out a long whiff of reluctant tobacco, and proceeded:

"You mustn't know as the horse is dead; that's the gentlemanly way to do it: then you must write to say how pleased you was with Acheron's performance, and that, if Mr. Crackenthorpe will part with him, say at a hundred-and-fifty or two hundred, you should like to have him. Of course master understands this; and he says to all his friends what a liberal gent the gentleman is as killed Acheron; and, the horse being dead, of course he declines to sell him; and then you sends him down a handsome hamper of the very best claret

as can be got for love or money, and you're friends for the rest of your lives. And now, sir, shall I send Jem for a fly for the next train?"

No, thank you, I'll go myself," said the little money-lender, mindful of a tip to Jem, and at the same time disbursing a sovereign to Billy, whom he looked upon as the pleasantest fellow he had seen since his arrival in Lushenham. Long before the return of the sportsmen, Mr. Cutpurse was on his way to Holborn, determined upon doing a handsome thing at very little expense.

After the breaking up of this cheerful party, things assumed their ordinary form, excepting that Captain Stuart liked his quarters so much that he proposed to remain a little time: and what with sending for a couple of horses from Pumpington, which he did under the sanction of Tom Crackenthorpe, and being alternately mounted by Tom and Munster, the Captain had rather the best of the riding. However, the season drew to a close, and he

was going to give his friends his services for the steeplechases, which he offered in a most disinterested manner. It is but justice to his discrimination to add that he meant squaring the account by some sort of book, as soon as the weights were out: and indemnification taken into his own hands was not likely to fall far short of his deserts.

Munster went on love-making. He had had some practice in early life, and, as he observed, he intended doing the right thing by his tradespeople whenever he got the money, which quieted his conscience to a certain extent. The Vicar was not a man of keen judgment, and gave his consent with some vague idea that a man with a horse or two was a great sportsman, and that a great sportsman must be a great catch. As to the money, well! the Bar was a profession, and it was quite clear his father must be liberal in his allowance. The Gorgon had some misgivings, but she calmed her perturbation by observing that, as the gentleman did not ask for money, it

was not her business to moot the question; and a fine old Irish family, and a connection with a former Ministry, although now out, which would have made old Munster an Indian judge, or given him the monopoly of leather breeches to the South Sea islanders, satisfied all scruples. The young lady was unmistakably and supremely happy. Her Bob, as she called the happy Verlobt, was everything, could do everything, had everything; and when he talked, as he sometimes did, of literature, she pictured a rush of publishers to get the first refusal of the new work, at say nothing under five thousand pounds. Considering how little she knew of the world, and the value of a well-blooded sensation novel, with a dash of murder, bigamy, and adultery in it, she was not exorbitant in her expectations.

Crackenthorpe's suit prospered just as suits always do when there's plenty of money and no pluck. Twenty times he had screwed himself up, and as often he came down again with a run. But he was

attentive as ever, and the widow twice as discreet. It is no use to conceal the fact that that artful woman meant marrying, and nothing presented itself within several points of Tom's form. Had Munster only been a little more shy than he was, perhaps he might have taken longer to jump into the trap that was set for him, and eventually avoided it. Marriage is marriage with a good many women, and Mrs. Partington was one of these, with all her sagacity and decorum. Matilda was not a bad-looking girl; and she would have preferred a landed estate, or something tangible in the Three per Cents.; but failing that, the girl was to be married, and there was an end of the business. The widow's mother, on the contrary, was a vulgar old woman, and she knew it: so she did not interfere with her daughter's game; and Mrs. Greystoke knew quite enough of shy birds to reflect that breadcrumbs injudiciously administered were just as likely to frighten them away as anything else. She bided her time, though

she once or twice thought of a counter-irritant.

We said that Captain Stuart accompanied Tom and Munster on hunting mornings. Not being much given to ladies' society, above all in the hunting-field, it is not extraordinary that he should have gone out three or four times without remarking upon the extraordinary beauty of the widow, or on the attention which his host continued to pay her. He only saw that she rode well and quietly, and, when the hounds ran, got out of the way, as she ought to do; and it seemed to him that his friend Tom did the same—he had not formed an exalted opinion of that gentleman's performance. It is right to add that Mrs. Partington had ordered the hat and cockatoo's wings to be dismounted as soon as ever Munster had made his offer, and the grey cob had returned to his duty between the shafts. The Bashi-Bazouk cousin was taken off guard, and allowed to ride where he liked; and the habit and feathers were put on one side for Miss

Josephine when she should be considered old enough to make profitable use of them.

However, before Captain Stuart had been very long at Lushenham, he managed to get a very near sight of the beauty; it happened in a singular manner, and produced equally singular results.

The hounds had been running their fox pretty hard for about fifteen minutes one morning, when Mrs. Greystoke found herself alone; not with them, but utterly lost. Whether her friend Tom had been caught by the pleasures of an unexpectedly good start, or, what is equally probable, whether he had unwittingly lost sight of the widow, I can't tell; all I know is that Tom Crackenthorpe was not in Rosebury-lane, at least half a mile from the hounds, and the widow was.

"Now," said she to herself—and people do not always speak to themselves in the choice language they can make use of before company—"here's a pretty kettle of fish. Where, in the name of Fortune, have I got to, and where are the hounds?

This comes of the timid and respectable. If my young man don't look after me a little better than this, or give himself a legal right to do so by coming to the point at once, I shall take to the old style again. I do hate this macadamizing process—but it's a long lane that hasn't a turning. He's not likely to see me if I take a jump now, I suppose."

Just at that moment a horseman emerged from a handgate close by, and followed her up the lane at a pretty good pace. He also said to himself, in the conversational tone more fitted for very intimate use than public airing—"Here's a woman! Now, what the d—l can she be doing here? They're always in the way. Not a bit of use trying to catch the hounds. I presume this is the line, and I must trust to a nick. Wonderfully compact lot that in front!"

In the mean time, Mrs. Greystoke, tired of the squelching mud of Rosebury-lane, determined upon quitting it; and seeing an apparently practicable fence, and no one

looking on, she sent the wiry bay horse at it.

"Bravo!" said Stuart involuntarily, who was just about the place where her ugly boy ought to have been with the second horse, but that he was some distance off enjoying himself with the hounds; "that's deuced well done—looks like a drop!"

And he proceeded to pull his horse together before following her example. It was well he did so; for, on looking over the fence, to his amazement, not to say horror, he saw a moderately-sized pond, with a horse, and a woman, and a hat, and a habit, and a quantity of light brown hair, not by any means so compact a lot as it was a few minutes ago.

"Now, that's what I call pleasant. I can't let the woman drown, and she certainly will if I don't get to her somehow."

So turning over the fence a little lower down, Stuart rushed at once to the rescue. She was already struggling up the bank, and a hand from her preserver, as she poetically christened him on the spot, being ignorant

of his proper name, helped to extricate her in a curious condition. When she emerged from the water, her skirt was nearly off, her hair floated all over her shoulders, and she had lost her hat—at least, if a thing whose whereabouts you know well can be said to be lost. Her upper person was dripping with water, her lower with mud. Her horse was getting out lower down. Having seen him safely landed, she turned to thank the unknown who had so opportunely arrived; when, just as he was about to express delicate fears lest she might have sustained some injury, he was startled by an exclamation of some vigour, and

"Why, George, you don't mean—"

"God bless my soul! Sophy, do you mean—"

And there can be no doubt that we should have heard what they both did mean, only at the moment their former prayers for a nick seem to have been answered; for the hounds came through the hedge, and foremost in the ruck that followed was Tom Crackenthorpe.

"All right!" said the one, with a most unfeminine wink.

"Mum's the word!" replied the other.

And in a moment the lady was receiving the condolences and attentions of the whole field. One man proposed to part with his own hat; another, by dint of dexterity which would have done honour to Poole's foreman, pinned up the tattered skirt; another produced a dry pair of Berlin gloves; and half-a-dozen at once recommended the masculine substitute for aromatic salts in the contents of their flasks and sandwich-boxes. The lady behaved remarkably well upon the occasion, and accepted the attentions and drinks with as many wry faces as becomes a lady of the first quality. But for a fortunate cast of Mr. Bumby, who paid no attention whatever to these irregularities, they might have spent the day in administering consolation; the hounds, however, hit off the scent, and a general scatter took place, in which Captain Stuart joined. Tom was most unfortunately left behind with the

lady; and having blown up the boy for his carelessness, and escorted his mistress to a village inn, where he was so fortunate as to get her a fly on its way from the Bundlecombe Station, he saw her safe into the carriage, and parted with the most impressive grasp of the hand that can well be conceived. Tom lit an enormous regalia, and was not fool enough to go in search of the hounds. He rode home in remarkably good spirits on that occasion, and not too fast. He loved to chew the cud of so pleasing a catastrophe in his every-day life. So he took another pull at his orange-brandy, of which the widow had left just a thimble-full; and having assured himself, by inspection of a small portmanteau, that he was not likely to be short of cigars, proceeded to think at a foot's pace.

"I know what my mother would say. She'd say, 'Tom, what a d—d fool you must be to go marrying a woman that you know nothing about, when with your income you might do so much better.' I know she wants me to mary Lucy Butter-

ton, because she'll have all the Buttercup property when her grandfather dies. But what's the use of a lot of money to a fellow that's got as much as he wants? and what's the use of money at all if you can't have the woman you want? I know some fellows say that all the women go for money. I don't believe that. Dash'd if I think Mrs. Greystoke cares about my money; 'pon my soul, I do think she is very fond of me. What a rum old girl her mother is! We should have to keep her out of sight; I couldn't stand that; and as to my mother, when they met — oh, lor'! — the little woman would go stark-staring mad at the very sight of the old woman. Hallo! Stuart, where the deuce did you spring from?"

"We lost our fox somewhere near those woods to the left; and, as there was no chance of a run, and I want this horse again on Thursday, I cut it."

"Did you do anything after I left?"

"Not much. We dragged on for about thirty minutes; but scent failed us alto-

gether ; and that cover looks interminable : they say the earths are open, too. What became of that Mrs.—Mrs.—What's-her-name, the woman that fell into the water? She's a friend of yours, isn't she ?"

" Oh ! I know her, of course," said Tom, as if it was rather a hardship, or that he had struggled against the acquaintanceship. " I know her, of course ; she lives in our village, you know. I put her into a fly at Toppington Green, and sent her home. But how in the world came you two in the water together ?"

" Well, Soph—, she, Mrs. Thingumybob rode at a fence out of a lane, and I happened to be going at the same place, and caught sight of her and her horse parted company, and struggling about in a pond ; I suppose she was over the fence before she saw the pond. She couldn't have meant to jump it, she's too good a judge for that."

" Rather a nice-looking woman ; didn't you think so ?"

" Oh ! tol lol for that," said Stuart ; " capital horsewoman, and as hard as nails."

"Well! I shouldn't have said that," said Cracks; "neat enough on a horse; but she never rides at all."

"Don't she, begad?" rejoined the other; and, here recollecting himself suddenly, he added, "Well, she looks like it. Is that the woman Munster calls the widow?"

"That's the woman; you'll be for making up to her?"

"Any money?" demanded Stuart laconically.

"Must have something, you know. She lives quietly enough; but the two horses and the boy in boots cost a trifle. He's a terrible boy."

"Is he? And has she any other adjuncts down here besides the boy and the nags?"

"Nothing but a mother—an awful old woman—and a piano."

"Did you ever hear her sing or play?" and Stuart waited rather impatiently for the answer to so common a question.

"Well, she does play and sing a little; not well, however. You're particular in

your inquiries, Stuart, if you don't mean business."

"What a clever devil it is!" (*sotto voce*). "Well, perhaps I do mean business, you know. I shouldn't mind betting a trifle either that I succeed, if I find the money all right."

"I'll lay you a hundred pounds you don't, if you like to book it," said Tom, somewhat piqued at the free-and-easy manner of talking of his Dulcibella.

"Well, then, done with you! She'll be my wife, if I choose to make her an offer, sooner than yours."

"All right, old fellow! put it down; you can ask me to be best man when it comes off;" and Tom put his horse into a jog, just to keep down his temper.

By the time they reached home they were just as happy as usual; and, as Lord Cropperton came to dinner to talk over the steeplechase and other matters connected with horseflesh, conversation did not flag. Munster was in unusually good spirits; and it crept out by slow degrees, in an under-

hand sort of way, that affairs at the Parsonage were all right, and a termination put to his anxieties. The wedding was to take place the first of May.

"Why not April?" asked his lordship.

"I couldn't have asked my friends without being personal," said Bob.

"But why the first of May, then?" asked Crackenthorpe; "sort of fête-day, regular holiday, in fact."

"It is for the sweeps: Bob's relatives want to come to the wedding," said Lord Cropperton, laughing. "He'll play Jack-in-the-green. Joking apart, Munster, it's rather short notice, isn't it?"

"Lots of bills coming due in June and July, so I couldn't put it off any longer; and then we're off to Ireland for the autumn. I shall come back and live cleanly after that. A quiet little house somewhere in the Regent's Park, and just a brougham for two months of the season. Happy to see you fellows; and now let's have a little chicken hazard; we shan't have many more opportunities."

"Stop, we want to settle about the weights for the steeplechase," said Cropperton. And accordingly he and Tom Crackenthorpe put their heads together, while Munster and Stuart began calling mains.

"Seven it is; that's three to me," said Munster. "Seven again; confound it! that's crabs; one to you: that's ten pounds."

"I think seven pounds is enough to give; did you say ten, Bob?"

"Yes: that makes three more, Stuart," chimed in Munster.

"Every fool knows that," said Crackenthorpe, looking at his list; "but I don't see why he should have more than seven."

"Only because he owes me thirteen; that's all."

"Ah! confound your hazard! I was talking about Sawbone's mare for the steeplechase; are you going to run anything for yourself?"

"Yes, I shall run something. I mean to make some money or lose it. It's the

last chance I shall have; so I shall put by enough for the wedding-presents, and sport the rest."

Stuart confined himself exclusively to the hazard and regalias: he talked less than usual, and when he announced his intention of leaving in a day or two, he rather excited the astonishment of his two entertainers, whose experience induced them to regard him, however fast, as a remarkably good stayer.

Two or three days after he did go; and while Tom and his friend were regretting the vacancy caused by his absence on a non-hunting day, and had just determined upon a visit to some livery-stables at Pumpington in search of a steeplechaser, the post arrived.

The first was a letter of invitation; the second of acceptance; the third from an impoverished schoolmaster in want of a loan; the fourth a circular on the subject of fine old port at 28*s.* 6*d.* a-dozen; the fifth from a baby-linen warehouse; three were bills, and one was a lawyer's letter

evidently. Before putting it behind the fire, Tom thought it desirable to read it; so he broke the seal, ran his eye down the contents, witnessed the hand and seal of Cutpurse, and then went into a most unearthly yell of mingled astonishment and delight. "What the deuce is the meaning of all this?" said he.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ACHERON REDIVIVUS.

At that moment Munster was engaged with devilled kidney and a muffin; but, hearing this appeal, he stayed operations, and took up the letter which Crackenthorpe passed across the table to him. He read it without that expression of surprise which was so evident on the face of his companion; and then, having finished his cup of tea, said. "Upon my soul, Tom, that's more than could have been expected from one of his persuasion."

"But have you read what he says about the pleasures of his ride?"

"Certainly; and I think he has taken a very curious view of what he calls a little accident or two; he hasn't the slightest idea how near he was being killed; but I

suppose you won't ask him any more for that; his offer seems pretty liberal."

"As he didn't break any limbs, a hundred and fifty is almost enough for the horse: a leg or an arm would have brought him up to three hundred at least." Tom was so delighted at the prospect that he lit a regalia, and drank the Jew's health in a pewter which graced the breakfast-table. "Read it out, Bob." Bob complied.

"'103, Pluckham Court, High Holborn.

"'My dear Sir,

"'I take an early opportunity of thanking you and my old friend Mr. Munster [confound his impudence!] for the delightful holiday I passed at your chattow. Business of great importance obliged me to leave your hospitable mansion unexpectedly; I hope you had a good hunt in my absence. The hurry in which I left Lushenham prevented me making those inquiries after the magnificent quadruped I rode, which of course I should have done, especially as I fear I was a little hard upon him.'

"What fools we must have been! we thought it was the other way."

"'I hope I am not taking too great a liberty in asking whether you could be prevailed upon to part with so valuable an animal. He carried me so much to my satisfaction, excepting a little accident or two, that I should willingly become a purchaser. I hardly know how to put a proper estimate on so valuable a horse; but if £150 is any inducement to you to part with him, I shall be most happy to send you a check on the receipt of the horse: he could come up by rail, and be sent on to me at my little place at Clapham, No. 21, Bunkum Villas, Streatham Road. I am not a great hunter, being usually occupied during the day; but I think I could snatch a Saturday now and then, to enjoy a little sport with the Tooting harriers; and the ride to and from Holborn would keep me in exercise.'

"I should think it would; what do you say, Tom?"

"I'd as soon ride him down Holborn as go to Tyburn in a cart."

"He'll never suffer again from dyspepsia after one such morning's exercise, at all events. He'd better alter his name."

"To what?"

"The Doctor—if he don't cure him he'll kill him. But there's a postscript:—

"'I hope you will excuse me if I have taken a liberty, or done anything to disparage the horse by my offer.'

"On the contrary, old boy; such a bit of ginger hasn't been his for many a long day. 150*l.*! Why, he's not much short of twenty years old, is he Tom?"

"He's old enough to know better than he does. What's that about his clothes?"

"Oh! he says—

"'I have forwarded some things that belong to Mr. Munster and your friend Captain Stuart, which were packed up with mine by accident. Would you allow your servant to forward the rest of my wardrobe: a dress-coat, and other things? and believe me, faithfully yours,

'ISAAC CUTPURSE.'"

"What does he mean by his clothes? How should I know anything about his dress-coat and other things?" said Tom rather indignantly.

"He means the rest of his boots; there

was but one and a half left, and Billy Drinkwater gave them to your gardener to put on the scarecrow in the peas which are just sown. You don't mean to refuse?"

"Not I. It's the first time I knew his value. Every man to his taste; but he didn't look as if he was enjoying himself much when he came out of the hazel copse and went up the hill towards the big bullfinch."

"He didn't look happy either when I met him on the stairs after his return. I suppose that walk taught him the value of horseflesh. He left a large piece of Billy Drinkwater's breeches somewhere, and the pockets were quite full of mud. Billy looked very closely to see if there wasn't a half-sovereign sticking in it, but he only found a toothpick and a halfpenny." Here they rose; and Bobby having lit a cigar, he sauntered towards the stables.

Mr. William Drinkwater was just completing his toilet. The principal instrument of his personal decoration at that moment was a small-tooth comb, with which he

appeared to be drawing off the water from his head. On Munster's arrival he suspended his operations from before the fragments of a small looking-glass, and, with an expression of much simplicity, said—

"Well, sir, any news this morning?"

"What do you think of a hundred and fifty for Acheron?" rejoined his second master.

"Ought to have drawed Moses for two hundred."

"Why, Billy, you're the biggest Jew of the two! Surely it's a good price for a dead 'un!"

"Many a 'stiff 'un' makes a deal more money than that," said the stud-groom sententiously. "Don't know nothing about it, does he?" added he, with a nod towards the house.

"Not if you haven't told him. He looked awfully astonished at such a bid from such a customer."

"No! I haven't said anything to him. Lor'! bless you, he's so simple: it's a lucky

thing he's got some one to look after his interests."

"He'll be here in a minute. When had we better send him up?"

"As soon as ever he's dressed over: we'll send him off to the station at once. Strike while the iron's hot. If Mr. Crackenthorpe was to find it out, he'd be as difficult to persuade as the other."

"I suppose Mr. Munster has told you we've had a bid for Acheron," said Tom Crackenthorpe, walking into the stable at that moment, and twisting a cigar in his mouth.

"Yes, he's said something about it; and how much have you got for him?"

"A hundred and fifty. Pretty good price, isn't it?"

"No ways too much; look how he carried the gent. Never tumbled much, and he hanging round his neck half the time. Dash'd if he ain't a wonderful 'oss; don't want no riding; best horse we got."

"When shall we send him away?" said

Tom, half afraid Mr. Drinkwater might be for keeping him—at least his share of him.

"Are you sure o' the money? 'Cos I ain't so fond o' them Abrahamites."

"Yes, that's pretty safe; what do you think, Bob?"

As Bob was pretty deep in the lawyer's books himself, he could afford to sell on the chance; so he said so. Mr. Drinkwater was lost in doubt.

"If he hasn't got it handy, he knows where to get it, I suppose," at last said he. "He's sure to have his hand in somebody's pocket at this very moment. Perhaps you'd better send him a telegram, and send the 'oss off by the next train."

"Rather sharp practice that, Billy."

"No sharper than his own, I'll be bound. Besides, I've known 'em die in a night, and then he'd be uncommonly disappointed. Pity to keep the gent waitin', if he's so very sweet on the 'oss."

"Tom was not convinced; but he took out the letter, and gave his faithful retainer the necessary direction, to be forwarded to

Bunkum Villas, Streatham Road, Clapham, for Isaac Cutpurse, Esq. Having made his mind easy on that point, the master and his friend left the stable, and went in search of a steeplechase horse to Pumpington.

Cutpurse, the morning after he had despatched his letter, rose in remarkably good spirits. He felt that he had done the correct thing, and, what was more, at very little expense. So elated was he with this position, a very new one to him, that he determined upon embarking in a little dinner.

It was a windy afternoon at the end of March, on the day on which the foregoing discussion had taken place, and which, as we see, had ended by leaving the matter very much in Mr. Drinkwater's hands, that the crafty lawyer, retiring to an inner room, washed his hands, and brushed his coat, turned down the wristbands of his shirt, resettled his collar and neckcloth, and rang his bell.

"Jenkins."

"Sir," said that hungry-looking func-

tionary, appearing with a sheet of copying-paper in his hand, and a pen behind his ear.

"Has Shuffleton been here to-day about that money?" inquired Cutpurse.

"He came this afternoon, and said you must renew."

"What's his furniture worth?"

"Not very good; all the rosewood's painted, and the hair-sofa and chairs is stuffed with cotton-wool. He said something about his wife and children."

"They arn't worth much, I suppose. How much did he have in cash?"

"One hundred and fifty, and one hundred in pictures. He sold them, and we bought 'em back at fifteen pound ten."

"Ah! they'll do again. No, we can't renew: our client wants money; give him a week; and if he comes here, I'am always in the country. When's Mr. Munster due?"

"The fifteenth of April. Anything about him?"

"He's all right; accommodate him at a

reasonable figure, say 35 or 40 per cent. He's going to be married; they always pay."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going now for good;" and with an extra polish to his hat, Mr. Cutpurse started for his nice little dinner at Simpson's.

A nice little dinner among three fasting Israelites, when aided by the charms of sharp practice and successful robbery, is apt to last some time. The three friends grew very talkative, and the host entertained his guests with his late fashionable sport in the provinces. His prowess in having killed a horse tickled his companions mightily; and they didn't seem to know whether it was to be considered a mark of their host's capability as a sportsman or not. He evidently regarded it in that light himself. After the port and sherry, of which they partook pretty freely, there came cigars and gin-and-water; and when Mr. Cutpurse looked at his watch, he found it was verging towards midnight. With a journey to Clapham

before him, he thought it late enough; but he was too polite to say so, so instead he proposed one more cigar. To his horror it was accepted by these gay young bachelors, who had no fear of Mrs. Cutpurse before their eyes. Young fellows are so inconsiderate.

At length he started. Well he might; for his shadow by the gas-lamps made some very eccentric movements from one side of the pavement to the other; and Cutpurse was quite sober enough to see it. He felt very much inclined to quarrel with his shadow, which was now short, now tall; and then suddenly lurched right into the road. Most extraordinary thing he ever saw in his life. Had he known anything about Chamisso and Peter Schlemihl, he would have remembered his remedy for having none at all, and have called a cab. He would have done so, but unfortunately there was none at hand. Could not be intoxicated; quite impossible! which he ascertained beyond all doubt by wishing

good-night, in a very loud tone of voice, to every policeman he met.

"Hallo!" said a sober citizen, up against whom he lurched in a very suspicious manner: "where are you going to?"

"Where I going to? why (hic-cough), home, to be sure."

"Well, stupid, you don't live in my waistcoat-pocket, do you?"

After a while he threw away his cigar: then he stopped, took off his hat, looked at the moon, and distinctly remarked the halo round her; carefully separated two sovereigns and a half, which he had received in change, from some silver in his right-hand pocket, and transferred it to his left; called a cab which was luckily passing, and got in with the loss of nothing but his hat, which rolled off from the door being lower and narrower than usual.

"Home, cabby; go home;" which cabby literally did; and half-an-hour afterwards he was aroused from a comfortable nap to find himself in a stable-yard near the 'Horns,' at Kennington. It took a little

time to explain matters, and when they were explained he started on his road once more. He stopped the cab a quarter of a mile from his own house, quarrelled about the fare, which he compromised for half-a-crown by the assistance of a policeman, and went cheerfully to his little villa in the Streatham-road.

His nap had done him good: he was in a remarkably jovial humour; on good terms with himself and everybody; and, like all really honest and prosperous money-makers, had forgotten everything but the necessity of getting up-stairs without being caught.

"Hang the key! it's got something down it," said he, struggling away at the door-latch; and so it had.

After some minutes' blowing into it, and several attempts to find a pin on the door-step, he began to see the necessity of ringing. He looked down into the area first; and, to his great delight, between the shutters he saw a light.

"Somebody burning the candles. Con-

found that Jemima! However, it's lucky she's up: hope she ain't robbing the house with her young man." So he ventured to ring the area-bell very gently.

Jemima wasn't long in coming out. "Who's there?"

"It's me."

"Ah, but I wants to know who's me," said Jemima, holding up a dip, which was immediately extinguished by a sou'-wester.

"Why, me—Mr. Cut—Cut—you know," said the master, rather indistinctly. "Don't make a noise."

Jemima disappeared, and in a minute afterwards was unbarring the front door.

"Lucky," thought Cutpurse to himself. "All right. Never felt better in my life. Gad! that last quarter of a mile has quite freshened me up. I wonder what Jemima's young man's like."

Here he found his way into the passage, and, falling over the umbrella-stand, was brought up by the stairs, the villa not being quite a Belgravian mansion.

"Please, sir, there's a young man been in the kitchen—"

"I know there has—young man been a-kisshing; but, Jemima, we don't allow"—Here he winked at Jemima, and attempted to chuck her under the chin.

"I said in the kitchen. Lor' bless the man! what's the matter with him? Surely he's daft." Jemima was rather provincial at times.

"Mr. Cutpurse! sir!"

Cutpurse looked up, and there, on the stairs, at the first landing, was Mrs. C. She was remarkable for a hooked nose, a sharp tongue, dirty curl-papers, a good deal of superfluous eyebrow, and the name of Rachel. At this moment she was clothed in a brown-holland wrapper of some sort, and a thing that looked very like a flannel petticoat was round her head.

"Cutpurse, you're intoxicated."

"Indeed, Rachel, you'll catch cold; the wind's very high."

"You've been drinking, sir; you're intoxicated."

"Not a drop—not a bit, that is." And, to do him justice, the sudden appearance of his wife had had a marvellous effect upon him.

"Go down, sir, and see to that 'orsin' fellow you've brought here to disturb your wife and family. Go down, and mind the candle. I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself, with your 'orsin,' blackleggin' fellows, eatin' and drinkin' here till past midnight."

"My dear," remonstrated the now sober Mr. Cutpurse.

"Don't talk to me, but go down and see that racin' huntin' scamp that's drinking gin-and-water in your kitchen."

"And thus violently adjured, the master of the house, utterly dumbfounded, took the light out of Jemima's hand, and proceeded to do as he was bid.

True enough, in the kitchen sat a very respectable man, not particularly the worse for liquor, dressed somewhat like a groom out of place, who, having been made aware, by the complimentary language on the

stairs, that the gentleman was come home, had finished his glass, smoothed his hair, and stood ready to receive him, hat in hand.

"Well, my man," said Cutpurse, "what's this?"

"Brought a 'oss over from the station this arternoon, sir, and was ordered to give this note into your own hand, and see as you got it safe."

Cutpurse opened the note, and, after reading a few lines, uttered a faint exclamation, turned suddenly green, and dropped quietly into the arm-chair which the cook had so lately vacated.

"When did you get this?" gasped the penitent Israelite.

"Come up along with the 'oss."

"And where is the horse?" inquired the gentleman most concerned in knowing.

"There warn't no stablin' here, so I left him at the Three Balls. Told 'em to give him as much as he could eat, and take greatest care on him, 'cos he's a valuable 'oss, said I, and I know'd you wouldn't like

nothin' but what was right. Nice 'oss he is, only got a bit o' temper of his own. Kicked off two on 'em—one's gone to the infirmary — so they sent me with him. Wasn't goin' to get rid o' me that way. But he ain't altogether a nice 'un to ride."

Cutpurse read the note again. It was in Billy Drinkwater's hand, and was laconic enough, but to the purpose. It ran as follows :—

"Lushenham, March.

"Sir,—Herewith sends you the horse. Glad you has got him, as he'll make a most waluable hunter to any gent as can ride him. He kicks a bit at startin'; but that's all play. Master will rite to-morrow morning. Please send back the clothing.

"Yours to command,

"William Drinkwater, Esq.,

"at Mr. Crackenthorpe's.

"To Mr. Cutpurse, &c. &c."

The lawyer read the note over and over again. There was no mistake about it; and there sat the living messenger of all his ills. Why the deuce hadn't the horse

killed him on the road, and run away with the note and the body? No: there he was safe and sound, handed over to him, Cutpurse. And then that villanous whip's warning voice came once more over the spirit of his memory: "Broke his back? I'm blowed if he won't break your neck!" &c. &c. And to-morrow morning was to bring him a letter, probably to tell him the name of the banker to whom the cheque might be made payable. A cheque for 150*l.*, and Acheron still alive!

"Well," said Cutpurse, waking up from his agreeable reverie, "all right, all right. I suppose that's all? Needn't keep you up any longer."

"Just this little account for the horse, sir, and my expenses. Deal o' trouble with him. One pound nine and sixpence and a receipt for the company."

"Confound it all!" said Cutpurse, diving into his pocket, and fishing up all his silver. "Oh, I know! All right," said he, diving again into the other pocket, and fishing up nothing at all. Confound! Oh, Moses!

Moses! Dash my wig! No! Yes! No! Yes! yes! I've gone and given those two sovereigns and a half to that beast of a cabman! You must call to-morrow, you must—all my money's gone." And with vehement lamentations he went forth from his kitchen.

However second thoughts are best; so, consulting a bureau up-stairs he at length dismissed the man, after a good row over the expenses, and retired to bed, but not to sleep. Mrs. C. was not a woman to be put off with any nonsense: before morning she knew all the ins and the outs of Cutpurse's unlucky purchase, excepting what he paid for it; and to simplify the calculation, he just knocked off the hundred.

In all his misfortunes he had one consolation. He was sure of an invitation to the Château (perhaps in the summer), when the amusements were less dangerous than at the present season. At all events —it might take time—but he saw his way into a good many hundred-and-fifties through his visit to Lushenham.

During three whole days did Mrs. Cutpurse launch her thunderbolts against the nasty racin' and huntin' lot that had led Mr. C. astray; had her own way for a month; and was at length over-bribed and silenced by a dinner at Gravesend, a new bonnet, and an evening at Rosherville. Long before that Acheron had kicked off half the Jews in London, and was at last bought at Aldridge's by a hard-riding cavalry man, who rode him as second charger, and had two days a-week with the garrison staghounds into the bargain. He realized 30*l.* at the hammer, and was a very excellent bargain. Amid the surrounding gloom one bright gleam shone out upon Isaac Cutpurse. Robert Munster's bill was punctually met—it is said with part of the money the wretched man had himself disbursed for Acheron. When "stiff-'uns" are mentioned in the ring Billy Drinkwater winks his eye, and implies that he once helped to do something in that way too.

Two things delighted the inhabitants of Lushenham and its neighbourhood. There

was to be a steeplechase and a match. The former of these two was to take place immediately. The farmers had to be remunerated for their consideration in keeping up the prestige of the Lushenham country as the very stiffest in England; and it was well known that nothing was so calculated to repay them for the mischief already done as to give them an opportunity of doing it over again for themselves. "No, no," said these jolly dogs, "we don't want money. You're welcome to ride over the crops, gentlemen, and break the fences. To be sure, there's no denying it does harm when the wheat carries a bit, and the seeds 'specially arn't the better for it. But I'll tell ye what'll put it all straight. Let's have a steeplechase over this very country. None o' your cast-off racehorses, but hunters every one of 'em—12 st. 7 lb. gentlemen or farmers to ride; none o' your professionals, but a real honest set-to among ourselves. If you want to see the other sort of thing you can go to Liverpool, or some o' them national affairs; if you want to see

hunters, why, they can come here, you know." With such sentiments as these, there was no difficulty at all. Subscriptions poured in from every side. There were stewards without number, some of whom forgot the very existence of such a place as Lushenham; plenty of forfeits, which were regarded as an excellent sort of joke, payable on Aldgate Pump; and the most accommodating secretary, who seemed to have no fixed idea as to the closing of the stakes. However, like everything else, this had a termination at last, and the stakes did close. There were about thirty entries, half of which were unmistakable starters, candidates for Downshire; and amongst them were Lord Cropperton, the sporting Doctor, Mr. Falconberg Smith, Tom Crackenthorpe, Munster, and a certain Captain Stuart. Every day was now employed in looking over the course, just to see that it had not been tampered with. Occasionally a broken rail was found; Peggs was at once ordered up with stiff timber, hammer, and nails. A gap was invariably *mended*

with a hog-backed stile. The cows had made the taking off at the water a little sticky; the whole was cut away "clean and sound" to the tune of a foot and a half or two feet; and when a remonstrance was raised against a really formidable bullfinch, with a very wide ditch on each side, the Doctor proposed to send his boy, to sit close by, with bandages and splints ready for action. He considerately added, "I shall charge nothing for his time, and it will be quite a holiday for him."

Can it be wondered at that beds were taken in the surrounding villages, and stalls and stables secured weeks before; that houses were opened, and dressing-rooms laid down, and bachelors' rooms extemporized, and extra cooks ordered up from Pumpington? Is it extraordinary that the widow indulged in a new habit, or that Tom fell back upon Poole for something with no end of lining, cuffs, collars, and pockets, which made a coat an article of most expensive luxury, and increased its original cost by about two sovereigns, leav-

ing us to wonder what sort of affair it would have been without those luxurious appendages? Even old Partington stood a couple of new bonnets on the occasion, and the old lady ordered a new silk dress and three-quarters of a yard more front, the same colour as before. So much for the preparations for the steeplechase. The match was between Robert Munster, gent., and Matilda Partington, spinster, both of this parish, and was set for the 1st of May.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COMING DOWN TO RIDE.

In a country village remote from cities, but devoted to sport, a steeplechase of any kind would have excited a commotion worthy of recognition. The object being, then, to appease the farmers at the expense of the gentlemen, and to test the merits of the weight-carrying hunter, in distinction to the jumping or galloping hack, the reader will not wonder at the preparations recorded in the last chapter. I was not surprised when I heard that Crackenthorpe had filled his house with as many as could well be got into it, reserving a corner for his friend Captain Stuart, whose arrival, however, had been deferred until the morning of the race. Most houses in the neighbourhood had a guest or two of their own,

as we have said; but on the night immediately preceding it the rendezvous was at the Château, and the generous host and his ally Robert Munster would take no denial. Lord Cropperton was there, and Ned Bingham; the hard-riding Doctor, and his sister, a good-humoured, sensible, well-behaved girl, rather plain than otherwise, who kept the Doctor's books and his house; Captain Gladwish; four bachelors from London, who had already finished the season; and Mrs. Crackenthorpe. This lady had long determined upon a visit, and, as it was not Tom's way to turn his back upon his own mother, however inconvenient her coming, he submitted peaceably, and asked the Doctor's sister to keep her company. Emily Gladwish was from home, and he thought Miss Scalpel better company than the Partington division. She had got over the first blush of womanhood, and was more capable of going through the heavy business than the rest. The unprotected widow was out of the question.

Of course Mrs. Crackenthorpe had a

reason for suddenly deserting Torquay and travelling eastward. That reason was as follows:—Some ladies from Leamington visited the place, and, with a sincere interest in Tom's welfare, had made some strong representations of the widow's charms. Some said it was a blind only for his real attentions in another quarter; others gave vague hints of a vicar with two daughters, and an invalid captain with one; and between them they fairly frightened Mrs. Crackenthorpe from the comfortable quarters in which she had established herself. So she came to sit at the head of the bachelors' party at Lushenham.

I ought to tell you that Tom was a perfect gentleman in heart and feeling, though sometimes a little rough in manner or speech. His worst enemy could only say that he was fond of his beer in the morning and his claret in the evening; that he smoked regalias in his drawing-room (but then it was his own); and that his dog-carts were apt to be loud. There was nothing in his house to which the

purest of mothers or women might not have been introduced. Every comfort and convenience was to be found there; an admirable household, and the best little dinners in the county. He was delighted to have her with him; but the very best of women can come *mal-apropos*. It was the case at the present moment; but if she did not feel it, why need he or Munster?

No opportunity had yet arrived for the widow Crackenthorpe to be introduced to the widow Greystoke. The former lady did not hunt, and had only seen her once or twice at the cover side from her son's brougham. That and the inquiries she made did not tend to allay her anxieties, and her present desire was that Tom should pay less attention to the widow Greystoke, and more to her.

Women have great quickness of apprehension, and want of charity, in all that concerns their own sex. A bold, dashing, riding female, alone with a mother in a hunting village, might well be an object of suspicion to the simple-minded villagers;

that she was so to a lady who had travelled from India to England, through half the capitals in Europe, cannot be wondered at. She had not even the protection of a child, a husband's best representative; nothing but the name of widow to show for the money.

The party had been at table about an hour and a half. The *chapon*, the *écrevisses* had disappeared, and the pudding *au citron* was going its round, when a ring at the door-bell announced an arrival of some kind. No announcement, however, took place; the ladies went on with their pudding *au citron*, conversation and champagne flowed abundantly, and in five minutes the circumstance was forgotten.

"I hope we shall see Mrs. Crackenthorpe to-morrow?" said the Doctor.

"Certainly; but not on horseback. I have offered your sister a seat in the brougham, which I hope she will accept."

"With great pleasure, thank you. My brother does all the riding."

"I suppose we shall have some repre-

sentatives of our sex, as usual, on horseback?" said the widow a little severely, eyeing her son.

"I shouldn't wonder, mother; some hundreds probably; it's common enough in this country." Tom felt a little savage.

"I should think old Partington will stand the grey again on such an occasion," said a sub in the Guards, who, having once seen the Partington equipage, had not forgotten it.

"I should say not," said Munster; "we shall have the pretty widow, however, without doubt;" glad to turn the conversation from himself, and rather reckless as to where it went.

It is but fair to the Guardsman to say that he knew nothing of Munster's engagement or of Tom Crackenthorpe's infatuation. "You've seen the widow Greystoke, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, I presume?"

"Once or twice," said she rather sententiously.

"I dislike riding-women (thank you! thought Mrs. Crackenthorpe), they're gene-

rally so vulgar, so full of the stable (charming boy that little Guardsman! again thought she); but I must say that Mrs. Greystoke's a beauty (oh! the little horror! almost shrieked Tom's mother); don't you think so, Tom?"

Tom, who was not unaware of his mother's sentiments, though unexpressed, would willingly have annihilated the precocious young monkey, who was fresh from a private tutor's, and ignorant of the locality on which he was dancing, when just at that moment the door opened, and a most unmistakable fracas in the hall reached the dining-room.

"What's the matter, Taplow?"

Taplow was the discreetest of men, and only grunted, shut the door, and began handing the first thing that presented itself to the first person he saw.

"Who's that at the front door, Taplow?"

"It's a-a-person as wishes to see you, sir."

"Well show him into the drawing-room: burgundy to Mr. Scalpel."

"It's not a-a-a-he at all," said the valet,

blushing, and endeavouring to make the communication as mysterious as possible.

"What is it, then?" said the master, with rising choler, and perfectly innocent of deserving any mystification.

"It's—it's—an hindividual, sir," responded the valet, thus pressed. "Sherry or madeira, ma'am?" continued he, addressing Miss Scalpel, and covering his retreat as well as he could.

"Then send the individual out of the house again, or into the library; and tell them to make less noise."

Let us explain. During the latter part of dinner—in fact, when the bell had been heard to ring—a fly had driven up to the door: on the top of the fly was a portmanteau, and inside a very smartly-dressed lady, apparently of middle age, and much given to colours; indeed, there was a general amplitude of dress, and pattern, and figure altogther, which was apparent on her alighting from the fly and venturing to ask for Mr. Crackenthorpe.

"Mr. Crackenthorpe is at dinner, mum," stammered the servant, "and——"

"Yes, I know he expects me; bring in the portmanteau, and pay the fly."

"Beg pardon, mum, but—but—you see, Mrs. Crackenthorpe's here, and you see, mum, master's——"

"Well, I can't help who's here; I suppose he's got the room he wrote to me to say I could have."

Just then, hearing the altercation, the housemaid appeared.

"Here, Mary Hanne, just come here a minute; this young 'oman says there's a bed for her."

"Go along, stoopid! there ain't no bed here for such as she."

"Well, you go and tell her so."

"I'm sure I shan't; it ain't none o' my business: pretty row there'll be when missus hears of this!"

"Now, then," called out the lady, evidently tired of waiting, "what the devil are you doing in the dark there? Do get

a candle, and show me my room: why, the man's a downright idiot."

At that moment Mr. Drinkwater, having just seen all safe for the night in the stable, came up to the hall door. "Why, what's all this? who have you brought over to-night, Giles—Mr. Stuart?"

"No," laughed Giles; "it's a young 'oman as come by the train."

"Oh! a young woman. We'll pretty soon have her out. The master don't stand none o' them games; besides, there's the missus here. Here, I say, my good woman——"

The good woman, who was carrying on a loud altercation with the man who had opened the door, turned round just to say, "Why, you infernal old fool, Billy! don't you——"

"There, that'll do, now, young woman; be off at once. Come, Giles, bear a hand, and you too, Richard. Bless my soul! what a way he will be in to be sure! I suppose she's got a drop o' drink, and mistook the house." Saying which, they seized

the young woman by the waist, and were struggling manfully at the top step; while the young woman, bursting with laughter, and half-throttling Richard, endeavoured to make herself understood. "I tell you—confound it!—I'm—d—— it, Billy Drinkwater, don't you know me?"

"Know ye? why, in course I do; I knows the whole kit on ye; bad luck to ye all! out ye go! so it ain't no use."

"I tell you, you stupid devil! I'm Stuart—Captain Stuart." But the noise was now outrageous, and Taplow, with a face of horror, came running along the passage, shouting—"Good heavens! what is the matter? You're to go into the library, and wait there."

"Upon my soul, Billy, if you don't let me go, I'll knock your head off your shoulders. You great fool! you've nearly torn my coat off my back. Look at my hat!" said the half-plucked female, giving her bonnet a kick, and pulling off a quantity of false hair, which half-smothered her left eye.

"Why, Taplow, surely you know me? now get me a light, pay the cab, and show me up to my room: one would think these people were all mad; they wouldn't listen to a word. They're all mighty virtuous of a sudden." Saying which, he seized upon his candle and was halfway up-stairs, whilst Taplow apologised below.

"You see, sir, we never expected you till to-morrow; and Mrs. Crackenthorpe's here, sir—that's the reason Mr. Drinkwater was so very particular, sir. Hot water directly, sir. Richard, take up the portmanteau, and tell Mary Anne not to stand giggling there, but to make haste,"

"Please, sir, it's Captain Stuart," said Taplow, re-entering.

"Then, why didn't you say so before? Let a side-table be put in the room, and the soup be made hot, as soon as he's ready."

"What sort of a person is Captain Stuart, my dear Tom?" said his mother.

"Stuart? oh! quiet fellow enough; you'll

like Stuart, my dear mother—don't you think she will, Munster?"

Munster assented.

"I suppose he's quieter when he gets inside?"

"Yes, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; he expends all his energies at the threshold."

"Just what he did with his money on the threshold of life. He lives remarkably well upon what he once had; like the boa constrictor, who subsists for weeks on a single meal, he swallowed all he had in one season."

"Does he ride to-morrow for any one?" asked Bingham.

"He has a nomination for himself," said Munster, in reply; "who rides for you, Doctor?"

"My brother would not forego the chance of breaking his limbs on any account," said Miss Scalpel. "Which horse is it to be to-morrow, William—the one you can ride, or your groom?"

"The one neither of us can ride; the other two are not fit."

Here Mrs. Crackenthorpe, signing to Miss Scalpel, and seeing that the conversation had taken a professional turn, rose to go to the drawing-room.

They had hardly achieved that feat (it is a feat, with the modern style of dress, excepting in large houses) before Stuart made his appearance.

"How are you? delighted to see you. Hope you got everything comfortable, old fellow? We didn't expect you to-night."

"All right: everything very comfortable, thank you," replied he, with his mouth full of soup.

"Fancy that fool Taplow coming in here, and saying first that you were not a He, and then announcing you as a hindividual!"

"Not such a fool either. I daresay I did startle them a bit; as to the man called Richard, I'm afraid I nearly strangled him. Sherry; thank you. I'd a bit of an adventure," added the *soi-disant* Captain, this quiet fellow; "but it is all right now. Lucky to get off at all; gad! I thought it

was all up at one time. And I bought a horse, too, and entered him. I don't know anything about him; he's a desperate puller, and kicks a bit at starting, but he can go on at a fair pace. I bought him at Tattersall's."

"What do you call him?" asked Crackenthorpe.

"The Devil among the Tailors. The first day I had him he went straight through the glass-doors of a Schneider in Conduit Street, and made his way into the back premises, where he cleared the shop-board in a brace of shakes."

"That doesn't sound promising for our country: there's a post and rail or two here, not quite like a glass-door in Conduit Street," said Lord Cropperton: "you'd better ride my horse; Bingham's going to steer the Squire's. He's bought a grey mare."

"I'll change, my Lord, if you like: that's as much as I can say."

"But what has that to do with the adventure? Let's have that," said two or

three voices at once, with as much eagerness as if it were the only one to be met with in the world.

"How came you to be an individual? Taplow looked as if he'd seen a ghost—*the* ghost, in fact."

"Well, I'll tell you. You all know Stanley Lane, Pimlico? No! Well, it's a quiet place; nobody ever molests one, and the landlady is an old acquaintance of mine. Accidentally, I was a little hard up, waiting remittances in fact, and a few little things due since the last Newmarket meeting; nothing to signify, but tradesmen are so confoundedly suspicious. They thought I was going abroad. I often do make a tour; I'm not fond of this climate, in fact. What an excellent salmi! Ah! champagne; thank ye! No—no ice; the wine's too good for that. Well, I looked out of window only yesterday, and saw—gad! sir, what do you think I saw?—hardly believe such a thing in my case; gad! I saw a regular bum-bailiff—sheriff's officer—or whatever you call 'em."

"How in the world did you know that?" asked the young Guardsman, just for information.

"How did I know him? Bless your soul, my dear sir! seen thou——, that is often read of 'em; Charles Dickens, and so on, you know; quite impossible to mistake—not with one of those descriptions before you."

"Well—what did he do?"

"He didn't do much himself; but, like a dog-in-the-manger, he wouldn't let me do much either. There he was, all day long. There's a public in the street; and when he was gone to dinner, I slipped out, but I was forced to slip back again; he was out in a minute. Then I waited till night. Sent the servant to look up the area; there he was still. This wouldn't do; no remittances; so I sent for the landlady. 'What's to be done?' said I. 'Pay him,' said she. 'Where's the money?' said I. 'What! not got the money?' says she. 'Yes, I have,' says I; 'but I mean to keep it.' 'We must manage,' says she; 'wait here;

I'll go out; and when I come back we'll see what can be done.'"

"Oh! the old story. Borrowed the money, I suppose, at five per cent., and lent it to you at thirty?"

"Not at all; she's much too honest for the first, and too wise for the second. She came back with a tallish woman, a mantua-maker, or something, a friend of her own; no great shakes in the way of beauty—yes, I'll take a little of that pudding, and another glass of that dry sherry—but most stunningly put together; all colours, and such a bonnet! There was nothing for it; I'm not a giant, and she was no dwarf; so I was soon turned into a rather gaudily-dressed female; and, what with a little shaving, a brown front, and a Parisian bonnet, I hardly knew myself. As to the gentleman on the watch, there was no more chance of his recognising his prey than the Emperor of China. A cab was sent for; my portmanteau was put outside; and, to make all safe, the landlady embraced me at the door on getting in; whilst the bailiff,

crossing the street, stepped into the hall, and waited patiently there until I was gone, doubtless thinking that his victim was up-stairs, and that all difficulties were now over. Mine were nearly, not quite. I covered up my face, but excited some attention in the ladies' waiting-room by the manner in which I warmed myself; fact is, I quite forgot myself—to say nothing of the horse-ticket which I was obliged to ask for. My new purchase was already at the station. I became suddenly not only a woman, but a wife. I spoke of the horse as belonging to my husband, who was to join me. Of course, he didn't come; and I got into the unprotected-females' compartment. I found an old woman and a young one, a nurse with a baby, and two children, who ran up and down from window to window, and played at cricket in the carriage. 'Tickets, tickets!' shouted the collector, as he ran along the line; for the life of me, I couldn't find my pocket-holes. Underneath I had on a pair of woollen-cord breeches; and my purse, tickets, and all,

were in the pocket safe enough : how the deuce to get at them was the thing. 'Any gentleman of the name of Stuart ?' shouted another, 'with a horse-box on ? Any one know anything about a horse-box, name of Stuart ?' 'Now or never,' said I to myself; 'I can't afford to lose the horse.' So I pulled up my dress, and pulled out my purse. I was just in time : 'All right, mum,' said the man as he ran along; whilst the lady who sat opposite, after a moment's reflection, put her head quickly out of the window, and inquired for a policeman or the guard. 'Porter, porter!' said she, emboldened by the horrors of being locked up with a maniac or a murderer. But it was too late; a sharp, shrill whistle, and away we shot."

"By Jove, you must have been in a considerable fix! Help yourself to that claret, and pass it to Captain Gladwish. You were safe to be done at the first stoppage. What did you do ?"

"By Gad, sir, I told her the truth to a certain extent! I threw myself on her

mercy. She was a good-looking woman; and I patted the heads of those cursed little children, who were making mince-meat of my corns every moment. Not exactly the truth, you know, but nearly. I knew she cared nothing about steeplechasing, nor bailiffs and sheriff's officers; so I made up a little history of a runaway match, and a lovely girl waiting for me and my quadruped down the line. She saw I was a gentleman, or thought so, at all events; and when I took leave of her, in the dark, she ended by—"

"Kissing you?"

"No, but by making the children do so. I'm not good at parting; but I gave them half-a-crown apiece for good luck. No—no more claret, thank you, Cracks. Ought not we to go to the ladies?"

"Your late occupation has improved your manners. Who's for a glass of sherry? Here, Bingham, help Cropperton. I know he likes one; and it will do him good for to-morrow."

With that they left the room.

The morning was fine; and at an early hour the arrivals bespoke a goodly sprinkling of company. Hundreds of foot-passengers of all sorts, accompanied by bright-looking women, such as England's peasantry alone can produce, came early to get a good position. They made straight for the brook, or the biggest double they could find in the line of running; while the better class made their way to the temporary stands. Why are these stands usually erected where the least or worst part of the race is to be seen? Here they were joined by part of the London division —pickpockets, touts, tipsters, and prophets, low betting men, and welshers, for whom the proximity to the brook proved convenient later in the day. About twelve came dogcarts and many humbler sorts of vehicles, the staple occupants of which were already accommodated with long pipes and a superfluity of beer. These were followed by heavy waggons, flys, and carriages, on which well-stocked hampers were apparent; and half an hour previous

to the proposed start, came well-appointed phaëtons, two or three drags, and a perfect cloud of horsemen, from the High Sheriff of the county and the masters of half-a-dozen packs of hounds, down to the well-to-do yeomen and hard-riding farmers of the adjacent counties.

At the Château everything had gone on admirably. Mrs. Crackenthorpe proved an invaluable hostess, cheerful and entertaining, and doing all she could for her son's guests. She highly approved of Stuart, who paid her every attention—a thing she was wont to exact, as having once been her due. She was not half so much pleased with the noisy young Guardsman and his friends from London, who saw in her nothing but somebody's mother, a woman of five-and-forty, who could not be made love to, or conveniently ignored. Ned Bingham charmed her by his gravity, and Lord Cropperton by his *bonhomie*. When she started for the course, in a very neat bonnet of her son's colours, she looked remarkably well—for her years.

The breakfast was no sooner over than it became necessary for the riders to start for the course, to walk over it, and see that the stewards had put nothing impracticable in their way. Crackenthorpe led, accompanied by Munster, Stuart, his own jockey Bingham, Lord Cropperton, Captain Forrester, the young Guardsman, and twenty hangers-on, some riders and some owners. In the wake of this interesting body came a donkey-cart. On the top of the donkey-cart sat a grave-looking individual in a paper cap and a flannel jacket; a small boy drove the cart; and inside of it, and sticking out far beyond it fore and aft, were some exceedingly strong new posts and rails. A hammer and rule were in his hand, and his pocket was full of tenpenny nails.

Of course they passed over the first three or four fences without any objection. There was nobody there who was afraid to ride. At last they came to the ox-fence on the side of the hill—a good post and rails, a straggling fence, and a very broad

ditch, which had the advantage of not being seen till you got close to it.

"Well, I don't call that such a big fence, after all," said the Guardsman; "go pretty fast at it."

"I should think not," said the Doctor, "now they've broken the top rail. Here, Stubbs, bring up the donkey-cart."

"Oh, hang it! 'pon my soul!"

But Scalpel and Tom (who was not going to ride) were inexorable, and a top rail about the size of a man's thigh was put in.

The brook excited some discussion; but as it was declared impossible to make it smaller, and it was perfectly symmetrical, the wiser thought it best to be silent, for fear of an improvement in the width by cutting it.

"At any rate, you can go in and out."

This was a great consolation; the going in being pretty certain, the going out problematical.

"Anybody object to this fence?" said Cracks and a brother-steward, coming down

to the double post and rails, which had a watercourse and a lot of blackthorn in between, and certainly required some negotiation.

"Yes, I do!" "And I!" "And I!" said half-a-dozen voices at once.

"So do I," said the hard-riding Sawbones. "I object very strongly. There's been some unfair play here."

"You object, Scalpel! Why, dash it, old fellow! this is the favourite bit which you liked so much. What the deuce do you object to?"

"Some fellow's been sawing away the second rail: just look where it's cut through. Here, bring the cart."

"No, no! let's take our choice," said Bingham. "The Doctor can go where he likes. There's one big enough, where he's standing, to upset a coach."

And Bingham's advice was followed. Altogether it was pronounced to be a stiffish course, but not too much for a good horse; quite impracticable, thank goodness! for a Newmarket weed, and a boy on his

back, but just the thing for a hunter, and totally different from the Leamington and Liverpool pattern—more like Market Harborough.

When the hour drew near for starting, the horses appeared on the course, closely clothed and hooded, as preserving that mystery to the last which attaches to all racing. Lord Cropperton's determined, big brown horse was known by the coronet on the clothing; Crackenthorpe's by its colour, a raking grey, which had replaced Blue Peter. The rest were not at first detected, save only Stuart's nomination, who disposed of the boy who rode him up in so masterly a manner, that Billy Drinkwater, who happened to see it, shouted, "If there ain't old Hacheron again, I'm blest!" When his master cantered him before the stand, preparatory to starting, his late proprietors began to think they might have asked too little for him; whilst such were Stuart's misgivings, that he was almost doubtful whether the thirty guineas he had given at Tattersall's, with-

out recognising him, was not rather too much.

"Bob, here's our old acquaintance. Where did you get Acheron, Stuart?"

"Acheron? That's the Devil among the Tailors. I bought him of some cavalry man who couldn't sit on him, at Tattersall's."

"He looks well. Have you backed him?"

"Yes, for a trifle—one hundred sovereigns to ten, four times over."

"I'll lay it you, if you like," said Cracks, in a good-natured tone of voice.

"Done!" said the Captain, pulling out his book in a phlegmatic way. "They're off."

I am not going to describe a steeplechase, even had I the pen of Homer or Whyte Melville. The judicious selection of ground had secured a few most unmistakable croppers, as, indeed, should be the case; but then the fences were of such a character that all the horses jumped at

them, and there were none of those ugly cases for the coroner which arise from a slipshod way of galloping through. There's nothing so dangerous as a too-easy course and a daisy-cutter. Over the big double, the first time round, two or three came to grief, the Doctor especially choosing a good stiff place, which did not give an inch, but turned him over. He did not, however, consider himself out of the race until his horse and he, landing in the water (if that's not a bull), began swimming rapidly down the stream, and eventually got out on the wrong side of a flag. Two strenuously refused the big bullfinch near the beginning of the course; but Ned Bingham came down at it by over-jumping, but recovered himself and his lost ground before the third mile. The horses going best were Lord Cropperton's brown horse Gipsy and Stuart upon The Devil among the Tailors, who, having taken the bit between his teeth, led throughout; and it was not till the third mile that his rider got a pull at him. When he did, his enemies and his

followers predicted his failure. "Of course, he must come back." But there could be no doubt that, with a good man on him, Acheron was not to be sneezed at; and Stuart, if he knew nothing else, knew how to ride. Half-a-mile from home, there were but three in the race—Cropperton, Bingham, and Acheron. "He can't win," said those who had laid against him. "By Jove, he will!" said the less-partial judges of steeplechasing: "he's pulling double now!" Two fences from home, the big brown horse made an effort, and soon found nothing but an accident could favour him. Bingham reserved his rush, on the grey, to the last fence, some bushed hurdles, at which they both went best pace. There was a minute's doubt on the part of the multitude. "The grey wins!" "No, he don't!" "Yes!" "No!" By Jove, he does! for the Devil went so fast that, on landing, he nearly fell, and Bingham galloped in, a winner by about a length; the Devil, late Acheron, a good second; and Lord Cropperton's brown horse third.

There were some late arrivals, which need not be mentioned; and last of all the Doctor, who was, as he said, not inclined to lose his ride, though his chance of winning was out. He looked extremely wet, but no ways disconcerted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RUN IN.

Tom Crackenthorpe's success was hailed with some clamour by the many. He was popular in the neighbourhood: spent his money like a gentleman, kept a good house, and was "hail-fellow-well-met" with his neighbours of every degree. Of course there were a few, who knew nothing about him, who said that he had made the steeplechase for himself, who did not know that his horse was almost a stranger to the course, having been bought out of a dealer's stable not many weeks before, and that he owed his triumph to the fact of having paid liberally and exercised considerable judgment in his selection. But his calumniators were found to be losers on the race, having backed Stuart's horse from his

information—not altogether unprejudiced, in their opinion. The result was highly satisfactory at Lushenham.

The widow was in great force, but had adopted a new line altogether. This was the result of a conversation which took place at the cottage a few days before the steeplechase.

"Well! my dear," said Mrs. Bransby, sipping a glass of warm brandy-and-water, and spreading out her handkerchief over her knees to save her dress from fire or water; "how do you mean to manage now the hunting is all over? Those horses and the boy must go back; pretty penny that'll be, I know."

"They're gone back; and I suppose the expense is my business, mother, and not yours."

Mrs. Greystoke was evidently not on her company manners.

"Hoity toity! bless my heart, Kitty! I suppose it arn't treason to make a remark?" and the old lady swallowed several spoonfuls.

"That depends entirely upon the sort of remark, mother."

"It don't strike me that the business gets on quite so fast as it ought to; and, as I took the cottage and holds myself responsible——"

"The business gets on quite fast enough to please me, and is pretty nearly over; so don't you fidget about your responsibilities."

"Why, Kitty, my own dear girl," and the glowing enthusiasm of Mrs. Bransby shone in every feature, "do you mean to say——"

"Yes, I do mean to say—that if you'll only let me manage my own affairs I shall be much obliged to you."

"To be sure, Kitty. Well, now, who'd a thought it? So he has really come up to the mark at last; and it's all right? Give you joy, my dear; and so you've sent the 'unting 'orses away. I knew it was a good plan though. They all like your ridin' women, they do. It wasn't so in my day; it was the quiet sow as sucked the broth. But what have you got to go about in?

Surely you mean to go to the steeple-chase?"

"Of course I do; I've sent for a neat brougham and servant from Pumpington, and I shall go as the quiet sow. I think it will suit his mamma better; and she looks very sharp after him, I can tell you. One can get about in a brougham well enough in the summer."

"So can two, my dear; and I find it uncommon lonesome here sometimes. Don't you think you'd better ring the bell, Kitty, and have these things taken away?" Mrs. Bransby finished her tumbler; "he often comes in about this time after dinner."

"He won't come in to-night, so you needn't be in a hurry."

"Why not?" said the old lady.

"Because his mother won't let him," said the young one.

"Well! I shall go to bed, at all events, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Bransby, rising and setting her wig straight. "Don't you forget now, Kitty, mind! quiet's the thing

while the old woman's here; colour don't look well in a brougham."

The consequence was that a dark-green brougham, with a good-looking horse and servant, conveyed the widow Greystoke to the most convenient corner of the course for seeing without being seen. She was dressed in the most becoming possible manner consonant with thorough respectability, which occasionally, in happy contrast to mysterious levity, delights to make itself hideous with affected plainness of apparel. She wore a handsome dress of French grey silk trimmed with black lace, a white tulle bonnet, a black lace mantilla or shawl, gloves faultless in shape, and contrasting with the felicitous hue of the bonnet's trimmings, and one handsome but exceedingly classic bracelet, of Rome Roman, giving effect to the rich sobriety of the rest of her costume. With her she carried her dear young friend Josephine Partington, the discreetest of confidantes, and the least attractive of rivals in the world.

Strange to say, she did not subdue Mrs. Crackenthorpe. That lady was strong in prejudice, and when she saw the woman whom she suspected of rivalling her in the affections of her son so apparently irreproachable and capable of doing it, she disliked and suspected her more than ever.

To tell the truth, the widow Greystoke was a successful contrast to the widow Crackenthorpe. The latter lady was a dresser too; but bright in colour, rich in texture, effective in *tout-ensemble*, behind the other in talent; and when she looked at *the* widow, the real Simon Pure—bonnet, robe, shawl, and ornament—she was compelled to admit that she was not much surprised at Tom's infatuation. Had she been asked for a reason she never could have given it; but she would have asseverated, none the less, "Mrs. Greystoke is not the woman for my son."

Tom Crackenthorpe seemed to have no interests beyond the brougham. Certain misgivings held possession of him as to the prudence of such a marriage, and his in-

tended mother-in-law would have sufficed to have shaken the stern resolution. But Tom, it must be confessed, had taken a longer slide on the slippy surface of love-making than he intended, and one of two things was likely to happen — either an unmistakable fall, causing considerable grief to the adventurer, or a fatal plunge right in, to his eternal weal or woe. Mrs. Crackenthorpe had no idea of the extent of the mischief done, and for her peace of mind it was as well that it was so.

The example of Robert Munster had also an evil effect upon him. Love-making is very catching : and although it is but just to say that Munster gave no great cause to the enemies of the tender passion to blaspheme, still, to see one's intimate friend and colleague admitted to all the privileges of incipient matrimony, standing, indeed, on the threshold of the sacred temple, and looking within, though not yet participating in the mysteries of that social institution, it was all Tom could do to refrain from proclaiming his own happiness at the

expense of a nine-days' wonder. However, notwithstanding the widow's innuendoes, Tom had escaped that last extremity of bachelorhood as yet.

We have seen what took place at one of the cottages in Lushenham three days before the race: let us inspect the Château three days after. All the men were gone, of course; there was nothing more to be got out of Lushenham that season. Some had to arrange for their London season, and others to get money for the following Monday at the Corner; so Tom and his mother had the Box to themselves, with one exception — Stuart was still there. He was evidently not quite in his usual spirits since the race; and, being reduced to a becoming melancholy by his inability to meet his new liabilities, he was proportionably agreeable to Mrs. Crackenthorpe. Tom was not fond of blue devils in any one, and, having discussed the matter of Acheron, and expressed his surprise at his running so well, he did not trouble himself about the matter. Excepting that he had

voluntarily lent Stuart a couple of hundreds to settle, he had not much to do with the results but to receive the money. But what woman ever saw a man "down on his luck" without wishing to give him a helping hand? Certainly not the mother of Tom Crackenthorpe: so from the moment she knew he had been in difficulties, and the steeplechase was likely to add to them, she took the *soi-disant* Captain under her especial protection.

Dinner was over on the Saturday night, and Tom Crackenthorpe had disappeared—as he said, for one hour *on business*, which was no compliment to Mrs. Greystoke. The widow Crackenthorpe was seated before the fire on a low, luxurious *prié-dieu*, with nothing whatever in her hand (no woman ever so much hated work). Stuart sat opposite in an easy-chair, indulging in an occasional disjointed remark, like a half-dumb piano out of tune, and wondering, meanwhile, whether it would be better to go to Tattersall's and pay, or whether he should temporize with his creditors and

realize, when the lady looked up from a curiously shaped coal in the fireplace, and said—

"Mr. Stuart, how long have you known Tom?—I mean my son."

"Not very long; only since last autumn; but long enough to like him."

"So I perceive. Do you know this neighbourhood?"

"Not in the least. I have been here once or twice before in my life."

"Then you can be of no earthly service to me." And the lady sighed.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; I should have been happy to have repaid some of the great obligations I owe your son." For once Stuart felt as he spoke: the 200*l.* cheque was beating against his waistcoat pocket. "Will you ring the bell? and we'll have a cup of tea. As Tom is not come in yet, it is not necessary to wait." The tea came, the fire got brighter, and the lady more wakeful as the evening advanced.

"You've been out hunting here this season, Mr. Stuart?"

"I have, several times," said the gentleman.

"There's a lady who rides here, I believe, with the hounds?"

"There are several: Lady Mary Bashful, Miss Wilford, Mrs. Toppington, and——"

"I mean a lady from Lushenham," cut short the widow Crackenthorpe.

"Certainly, Mrs. Crackenthorpe: there's the parson's daughter, whom Munster is going to marry; nothing very extraordinary——"

"I mean a very pretty woman — a widow."

"Beauty, after all, is a matter of taste; I certainly don't admire Matilda Partington myself; but, of course, Munster's ideas of beauty——"

"Do you know a woman whose name is Greystoke, and who lives in the little white cottage near the Parsonage?" *Woman* was strongly accentuated.

"Greystoke? Greystoke?" said Stuart, as if a little uncertain. "Oh! yes, undoubtedly, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; but, really,

there are so many women out hunting now-a-days that——"

"Just so, Mr. Stuart; but that it is, between ourselves, which makes me—which—in fact—you understand—but I shouldn't like it to go any further, and I'm sure I may trust you."

Stuart said she might; and if that was all she had to communicate, the lady might have saved herself the trouble of looking for a confidant. After another pause, during which Mrs. Crackenthorpe looked at her handkerchief, and played with the lace and the monogram, and Stuart looked at his boots and his watch, the attack was recommenced.

"I can't help thinking that Tom is very fond of you, Mr. Stuart: he often speaks of you and Mr. Bingham as his greatest favourites."

"I have the most substantial reasons for believing it at this moment."

"Ah! you men, too, have so much influence over one another on certain subjects—you understand me?—on certain subjects

—so much more than even his own family. Now there is a—a—what shall I call it?—a sort of entanglement into which, I'm sure, Tom is falling, and—and—if—that Mrs. Greystoke—oh! Mr. Stuart, I can't bear to think of it, and yet I can't make him understand my views of it at all—not at all. I cannot think it would be for his happiness—he can't know anything about her. Now you, you know—you can't think what an effect ridicule has upon Tom; and if you feel under any obligation to him, it would be such a thing to prevent him making a fool of himself. Now, do, *do* say a word or two!"

"I can't flatter myself that I can have much influence over——"

"Try—do try, Mr. Stuart; and if you only knew what I should feel; the eternal obligation——"

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Crackenthorpe. I don't think I shall succeed with your son, but suppose I try the lady?"

"Ah! Mr. Stuart," said she, laughing, "I don't want you to run your head into the lion's mouth for——"

"For Tom! I've been in the lion's mouth before, and if you'll keep my counsel, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, I think I can make a clear field of this in a few days."

Tom's step was heard outside the door, and the conspirators stopped.

On Monday Stuart went up to Tattersall's, and made good use of his money or his credit; and, as he carried back his masquerade costume in his portmanteau, it is to be presumed that he was enabled to stop the mouths of his creditors for a time.

Tom Crackenthorpe was sufficiently perplexed by the requirements of his mother, and the demands on his time made by Mrs. Greystoke. As affairs drew to a crisis that lady became a little *exigeante*, and the embryo Squire had something to do to keep the two ladies apart, and to satisfy all inquiries on either side. He led but a sorry life of it between love and duty, which, unfortunately, are sometimes inconsistent with one another. What with lying to both parties—which he did, I regret to say; what with dodging in and

out of both houses, for the widow could no longer take a ride; and what with the restless nights he endured, always the portion of the undecided, he looked as miserable as it was possible for one of the most jovial young bachelors upon earth. Robert Munster was in town, assisting in his preparations for the most important event in a man's life, and in satisfying his friends and the money-lenders that he was on the high way to meeting his bills by a prosperous marriage; and, as most of them had discovered that Miss Matilda Partington certainly was an heiress, if there was any truth in Doctors' Commons, they were not loth to advance at something under thirty per cent. Old Munster added to the general hilarity by a grumpy but tacit consent, and took himself off to Ireland, after writing a congratulatory letter to the bride-elect, ending with an Irish howl of glorious anticipation that Robert would prove as charming as a husband as he had been dutiful as a son.

There was joy in the halls of Lushenham,

therefore, when, at the end of another fortnight, Stuart reappeared. What with billiards and steeplechasing conversation, an occasional cigar, and some excellent '47 claret, Tom's soul became less restless, and Mrs. Crackenthorpe seemed to place every reliance in her guest's promises. They were fulfilled in a rather unexpected manner.

Sunday morning rose bright and cheerful on the 14th of April, 18—. Tom Crackenthorpe made a point of going to church; Stuart did not. Without wishing to analyse motives, we cannot withhold our praise from the former of these two gentlemen, who always set an example of propriety to the young men of his acquaintance by all outward observances. Partington spat and sputtered as usual; the music was just as charming as ever, excepting that the bass got a bar and a half a-head of the trebles; Lord Cropperton yawned at the end of the customary twenty minutes; and the school children had adopted their spring coughs with their summer bonnets. Tom

stole a look or two at the widow, then at his mother; the two ladies were as religiously disposed as a couple of recluses, and looked at nothing but the bonnets of the Vicar's wife and daughters. The longest service must have an end, and the congregation at last found itself in the churchyard. The usual compliments of the day were passed; and, just as Tom was about to retire, *the* widow returned his salute with a rather resolute blush, and an *empressement* more than ordinary. As she held out her hand, and showed a set of teeth which did her early dentist great credit, she said, with a smile which belied a sigh, or a sigh which belied a smile, "Mr. Crackenthorpe, I come to say good-bye; we leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said Tom, employing all the breath that remained to him.

"Yes, to-morrow: the season is over, and I think—I think my health is pretty well re-established; I shall have no better opportunity of saying adieu." And with a sweeping curtsy which comprehended the

Squire and his mother, the Vicar, his wife, daughters, and congregation in general, and a gentle sigh which went home to Tom alone, Mrs. Greystoke took her leave.

That Sunday afternoon Tom spent in company with an enormous regalia; Mrs. Crackenthorpe, in comfortable security of mind, in the Lushenham Hall pew. Stuart was not at home; he had walked out over the late steeplechase ground, and, lighting a cigar, he sat quietly down on a hog-backed stile, and turned over in his mind a few disjointed thoughts. "Well, it's done: that's a comfort. I suppose this is the first honest action I've done for some years. Let's see how it pays. The marriage, if successful, I presume they'd have come down handsomely at first. In six months he would have paid more handsomely to have got his release. Wonderful game in my hands, to be sure. For what have I sacrificed it? To save a capital fellow from a very awkward predicament. What prompted me? Gratitude, gratitude! 'pon my soul—nothing else. I can hardly be-

lieve it. I wonder what he'd come down with if he knew it all? Not much, for a week or two. Very cheap to his mother at a thousand. However, he's a deuced good fellow is Cracks. And, considering I've cut my own throat, I don't feel so bad, after all. 'Gad! I believe I'm a very honest fellow!" And with this sentiment he finished his cigar, and turned once more towards the Château. If appetite has anything to do with conscience, Stuart's must have been singularly clear. If Tom was buried in the depths of despair, his friend was in the seventh heaven. Tom was *distrait*, and began already to discover that Lushenham was confoundedly stupid. Stuart spoke of his own misfortunes and necessities with considerable *aplomb*, and appeared to have begun a new life, full of hopeful anticipations. Mrs. Crackenthorpe and he carried on an uninterrupted and very animated conversation on dozens of subjects, and had it all to themselves. At length the lady retired, and Tom set to work at the claret in right earnest. Men

can't go on drinking and smoking and staring at each other in that way without conversation; so at last they began—first about the late season, then about the next, then about the studs for sale, then about Acheron, thence they got to riding, then to women, and by a not difficult transition to the widow. "Ah! she's gone—going, that is, to-morrow."

"Gone? impossible!"

"Going to-morrow—so she said, coming out of church," replied Tom, with a slight choking, which might have been the claret.

"Curious woman; couldn't make her out," said Stuart apologetically.

"I don't think you ever liked her?"

"Not much, certainly: do you recollect a bet we had some time ago?"

"Certainly—one hundred," said Tom; "you'd have lost."

"How do you know? Do you mean to say, Crackenthorpe, you really thought of marrying Mrs. Greystoke?"

Tom looked profoundly sheepish, took his regalia out of his mouth, turned it round,

put it back again, and replied in a low tone—"I might have done so."

"You couldn't," said Stuart, shooting out his head, and fixing his eyes steadily upon his companion.

"And why not?"

"Because she's married already."

If the earth had opened and the claret-jug and its contents had suddenly disappeared, Tom could not have looked more disconcerted.

"Oh, nonsense!" and he turned round, and threw his legs up on the sofa on which he was sitting, and sent out a whiff of tobacco which bespoke unutterable contempt. "Whom to?"

"Suppose I say it's to me?"

Tom elevated his eyebrows, and was perfectly awful to look at as a grand example of disbelief.

"Will you listen to me while you smoke your cigar?" said Stuart.

"Of course I will, if you wish it."

Tom rang the bell and returned to his recumbent position.

"Bring another bottle of claret, make the fire up, and tell Mrs. Crackenthorpe not to wait tea for us; we'll have a cup of coffee in here."

Had I the pen of a Fielding, a Le Sage, or a Defoe, I should have thought it my duty to have headed a chapter, thus late in my sketch, with 'The Story of Captain Stuart.' Not having the lively imagination of those writers, who interwove story within story, and—very types of a steam-engine—worked wheels within wheels, I shall make our adventurer give the salient angles of a life remarkable for nothing but its systematic deviations from rectitude and prudence, and its final inconsistency in an act of honesty to serve no purpose but an impulse of gratitude. An analysis of the human mind will show that the two are not incompatible the one with the other. Let him tell his tale in his own way.

"You know, old fellow, you've been deuced kind to me. You got me out of a mess the week before last, that money won't repay." Cracks thought it wouldn't

either; but he didn't say so. "The long and the short of it is, I owe you a good deal"—one way or the other he did—"and I don't see how I could do otherwise than tell you the truth." Tom waited to see how much that was worth, to knock off the balance. "Well, then, my father was a clergyman, one of your pluralists, as you call 'em. He'd a living in Essex, and another in Sussex—both of them pretty good—and a small estate in Wales. In fact, he was tolerably well off, and as long as we lived at home it was all very jolly. We had lots of horses and company, and did pretty much as we liked; and the old gentleman never grumbled. But there was one thing he hated—he hated to pay a good stiff sum out of his income for anything that didn't show—didn't seem to tell, you know, such as education. My eldest brother went to Cambridge, and he spent a lot o' money; and Dick, he took to the law—and that cost a good heavy sum, I suppose, for the premium, or whatever it is; and Charles, he went into the army, and this sickened

the governor; and, when it came to me, he would keep me at home. I'm hanged if I know where I learned to read or write—my sisters or the governess must have taught me. As to school, I believe I went once, but I ran away; at all events, it was only by snatches, and the old gentleman used to growl so when the bills had to be paid. Of course I liked being at home—and I used to hunt and shoot, and amuse myself; and I think he liked to have somebody to go out with the girls—it saved him trouble. I was always with the officers at Fort Muster; and, what with blind hookey, and hurdle-racing, and duck-hunting on Sunday, and the garrison hounds, I wasn't good for much at eighteen."

"Very few people are," said Tom parenthetically; "I wasn't myself."

"The worst of it was, too," continued Stuart, "that the governor never made me any allowance, so that I never knew the use or value of money, any more than the proper way to get it. If I wanted a horse, I got it; and if nobody could or would lend

me money—neither the officers nor my sisters (who were like all other sisters, and spoilt me because I was the worst of the lot)—I used to give a bill at three or six months—an easy method, you know, of paying double for everything. Originally I don't think I meant to be dishonest; but I had imbibed a sort of idea that it was right to have money, *i. e.* pocket-money, but that all bills took care of themselves. They only seemed to want renewing to make all smooth; and I had at one time invented a mental arithmetic, by which a man could live, and everybody else indeed, for ever, at so much every three months, according to the size of the original investment in stamped paper. I find that it does not answer for individuals, though I am told it has been extensively employed in the United States of America. When I was twenty-one years old my father died. We ceased to have a home; his fortune was divided, and he had not insured his life for a penny: in one year's time I had entirely dissipated the few hundreds that came to

my share; and perhaps my greatest regret has been that I was fool enough to spend half in satisfying my creditors, from whom I ought to have run away. I was arrested a dozen times; and, as it was not unfrequently at the house of a brother or sister, who meant to be kind to me, I soon disgusted every member of my family. I lived partly on the turf, partly on my late friends who had not found me out, and partly by a promiscuous sort of gambling. I have been a private in a cavalry regiment, officiated as an English tutor and chaplain at a German spa, and driven a Hansom cab, without detection; and I can safely affirm that the last occupation was by far the honestest and least vicious of the whole. As there is a theory extant that no man can be utterly done until he is married——"

"Of course not," said Tom; "if going down hill, the double weight quickens your efforts; if rising, it impedes them. But go on, as I don't see how that affects

your case: help yourself, and give us the claret."

"You'll see whether it affects my case. Admitting the truth of this theory, I proceeded to put the climax to my absurdities. I was in luck at the time; had won some money at a hell; had changed my name, and had become rather a fast man about town. I was one night behind the scenes at a low theatre on the other side of the water. I was attracted by a remarkably pretty face, good manners, a fine figure, and an air of respectability, aided by an obese mamma, who guarded her darling from the chilling effects of the night air and the warm importunities of the Surrey *roués*. I was admitted as a privileged visitor. They speculated upon my ready money, I on the prospect of happiness and a home by my wife's exertions. We were a nice couple, and, having deceived one another thoroughly, and achieved a notoriety which boded no good to us mutually, we agreed to separate. We have not met

for about eight years: whether she continues, during the summer months, to dance on the tight rope as formerly, to lead the village choir in 'Masaniello,' or to captivate all hearts on market-day on the fiery steed Demonologos at Mr. Cooke's Circus in the provinces, I can't tell: she rides the high horse in the winter, at all events. I was lucky. An aunt, who was ignorant of the extent of my vagabondism, but knew enough of it to control her generosity, left me a bare sufficiency, to be paid by monthly instalments, upon condition that I took my mother's name. I have since complied strictly with the injunction."

"And who in the world was your wife, and what has become of her?" said Crackenthorpe, suddenly sitting upright on the sofa.

"We called ourselves Fisher, which was the name of my father and family; and for one week I called her Kitty."

"And you've never seen her since?"

"I've never seen Kitty Fisher since, but I've been introduced to a lady who closely resembles her."

"And where is she?" said Tom, getting quite anxious.

"She's going to London to-morrow morning, and she calls herself Mrs. Greystoke."

Tom Crackenthorpe rose, took a tumbler, emptied about one-third of a bottle of claret into it, and drank it solemnly off. He then took Stuart's hand, and said—"Now I understand all about it; better late than never. So that woman meant to marry me?"

"Undoubtedly; and she generally does what she means."

"And you recognised her at first?"

"Immediately."

"Why not have mentioned it before?"

"Could I have guessed she was likely to have fixed her talons in you as she did in me? She stung me hard enough to have left her sting behind. No, no, Crackenthorpe. I haven't been educated to have any principles; never cultivated them; but gratitude grows wild, I suppose, in some soils; so I started her; told her it wouldn't do. You know, between ourselves, I had a bit of a struggle, and I felt once or twice

like a d——d rascal. I suppose you never knew what it was to be a beggar, or a cabman, or a horse-soldier, or a prisoner in Whitecross Street?"

"Never," said Tom; "but I can feel for you, Stuart. You've done me a service, though it's a little hard to take the physic at first; so finish the bottle, and let's go to bed."

A few weeks afterward the two went abroad together; since which time Stuart's affairs have righted themselves by slow degrees; and he congratulates himself upon having narrowly escaped being the greatest scoundrel unhung.

Now for Robert Munster.

The first of May came round, as such days must come. It was a gala day for the village of Lushenham. The county paper gave a most flourishing account of the bride and bridegroom, the school-children and the flowers, the pathos of the spluttering divine who stammered over the service, the grandeur of the mother-in-law, and the loveliness of the bridesmaids. But it is

mine, and mine only, to recount a terrible truth connected with these matrimonial quicksands, on which are wrecked the happiness of so many. There, on that fatal morning, sat, encircled by her ordinary companions, the real Simon Pure, the original Matilda Partington, the actual heiress, the possessor of twenty thousand pounds, the *niece* of the Reverend the Vicar, and his ward, neatly preserved, and justly, for his own son, atthat time serving in one of Green's merchant-ships. No one could see this young lady without admiration. She could have well dispensed with her attractive fortune; and when Bobby Munster first set eyes on her, even on his wedding morning, he could not help feeling that he might have waited and fared better. It was, I am glad to say, not till after the happy knot was tied that a formal introduction took place to "My cousin, Miss Matilda Partington, of Cold Shoulderingham," and it was not till the third day after that happy morning that the bridegroom had ascertained beyond all doubt that he or Doctors'

Commons had made a slight mistake. Then arose in all its horrors the ghastly array of bills accepted, payable, which could not be paid; of the little house, and the wedding tour, and the dear, innocent, unsuspicious girl, who was for spending money as if her Bob's nightcap had been Fortunatus's wishing-cap; and, as these two ill-regulated minds clashed rather unmusically whenever expenses came on the *tapis*, Robert Munster decided upon falling back upon the fathers. The newly-married couple were hurried into a cheap and dull town in Flanders: the bills were collected, taxed, and compounded for by the elders, and there habit and hard work has almost reconciled the pair to their lot. Bob practises his profession, and is thankful for a brief—when he can get it; he occasionally writes an article, and is paid for it, but not in the *Times* nor the *Quarterly*. His wife is nursing her second baby. His work and her nursing have wrought a wonderful effect. Perhaps he's as well without the heiress, after all.

For a happy marriage, however, it was

very like an Armstrong shell: for it disabled the couple itself, two fathers, a mother, several sisters, an indiscriminate phalanx of money-lending Jews, and a lady at Pumpington. Bob looks back to that season at Lushenham with mixed feelings, at best.

The Château has been let. Its owner returned from the Continent, and hunted through the winter with increased satisfaction that there were no more widows about the country. But he met with an enemy nearly as dangerous in the wire-fencing. It turned him over as effectually as Mrs Greystoke herself; and if she broke his heart, she did nothing towards damaging his horse's knees.

Stuart became his right-hand man when he came into his well-nursed property, and manages to see a good deal of sport upon the agency of the Crackenthorpe estates. Mrs. Crackenthorpe thinks she never can be sufficiently grateful to the wily Captain, who now eschews bills and "lives cleanly."

Tom is about to be married to an old

acquaintance—Emily Gladwish. His susceptible temperament could not get through the winter without something to fall in love with. The Pumpington belles were too far off to fan a flame which wanted constant feeding; and one day, when his mother had imprudently left him to make a visit of a fortnight, the irrevocable word popped out. The widow Crackenthorpe returned only in time to be apprised of everybody's consent but her own; and, although she would have preferred a lady of title, or of strikingly brilliant position, the sweet temper and winning ways, the bright and cheerful intellect and feminine grace of Tom's dear Emily, reconciled her to a state of unclouded happiness for her son.

She dispenses Tom's boisterous hospitalities in another county, and the Box for a Season knows him no more. It is still the residence of a bachelor, who delights in the grand pasture-lands of our favourite hunting country, and who has matured the ill-directed though honest endeavours of

Tom Crackenthorpe for the development of steeplechasing to something like an efficient result. May his efforts be crowned with success; and may the nationality of that glorious sport find an honest parentage there, in lieu of an unjust and cruel stepmother, who has utterly crippled her bantling, elsewhere!

Another House reigns in the place of the Crackenthorpe dynasty, but the Château at Lushenham continues to this day to be the pleasantest bachelor's box in the county.

THE END.

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